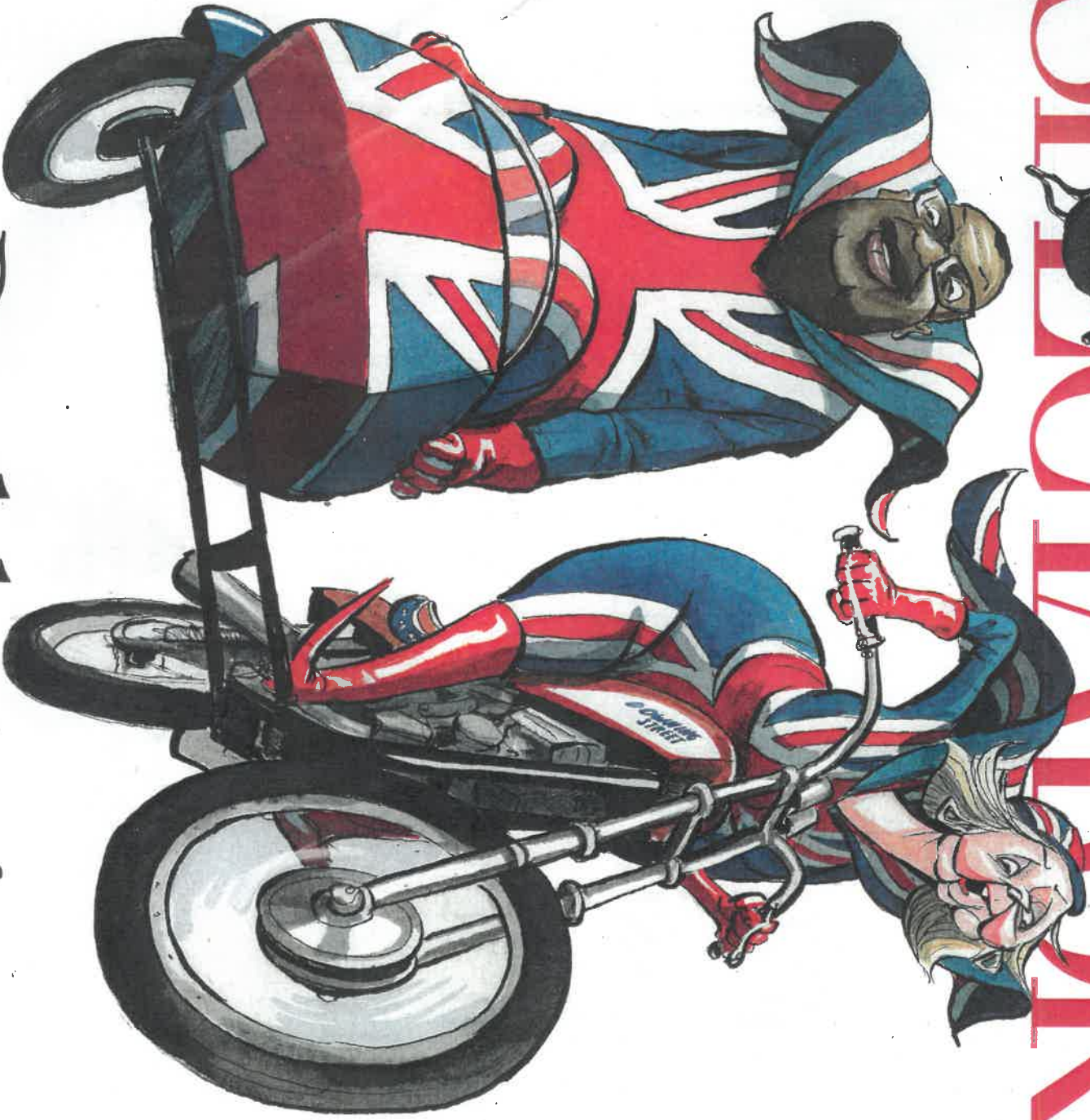


Kill badgers, save hedgehogs *Mary Wakefield* / **In defence of Soho House** *Tanya Gold*

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THE SPECTATOR



Buckle up!

James Forsyth and Katy Balls on the Liz Truss era

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Health warning

It's hard to think of any Prime Minister who has entered office surrounded by such low expectations. Liz Truss was backed by just over half of Conservative party members and secured barely an eighth of MPs in the first ballot. Her critics dismiss her as a lightweight, wholly unsuited to tackling the problems now facing the country. The presumption is not just for trouble, but calamity: the fastest drop in living standards in living memory, followed by prolonged recession and worse.

So if Truss manages to send inflation into reverse and makes a noticeable cut to taxes by Easter, it will be seen as quite an achievement. She has also been helped by Rishi Sunak's somewhat wild exaggeration of the risk her tax cuts posed to the public finances. Her proposed reduction of National Insurance by 1.25 percentage points, while welcome, is rather small – and was priced in by the markets some time ago. If they were going to baulk at Trussomics, they'd have done so already.

Perhaps the biggest threat to Truss's survival is the state of the National Health Service. It's striking that her long-standing ally Thérèse Coffey, now her deputy, was asked to become Health Secretary. The new Prime Minister must deal with an organisation in deep crisis.

Some 29,317 patients had to wait more than 12 hours to be admitted to hospital after being seen in A&E in July, up from a few hundred before the pandemic. The average ambulance wait time for illnesses such as strokes was just under an hour, three times as long as was normal in 2019. There are 356,000 people who have waited more than 52 weeks for an operation or other procedure – such waits had been eliminated prior to Covid. Traditionally the summer has seen a lull in NHS demand before cold weather and

winter viruses set in. There's been no such lull this year. In a sign of what might be to follow, Australia has just seen its biggest flu spike in five years.

Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer, is concerned that low temperatures will lead to thousands of extra deaths. This fear is well-founded. Every winter, Britain suffers at least 20,000 excess deaths – a figure that would cause much more controversy if those affected did not tend to be in their eighties and over. Studies show that when home temperatures dip below 17°C, the likelihood of blood clots, strokes and death goes up dramatically. Official guidance is to keep living rooms at 21°C for the elderly, but how many

*Too many lives are
at stake for NHS
reform to be ignored*

can afford to do that this winter? Britain's poorly insulated homes mean our winter excess deaths are far worse than those of, say, Norway. Combine this with an NHS that is already toppling over and the picture is stark.

It is ironic that the NHS overload is down to the panicked decision to impose lockdowns, which were justified by the prospect of an overwhelmed NHS. The public answered calls to 'protect the NHS' by not using it – a message health chiefs deeply resented because they knew the failure to deal with smaller health issues leads to a build-up of bigger issues further down the line.

In all, there seem to have been eight million fewer NHS appointments during the lockdowns. The original assumption was that half of these people would seek health-care eventually, which is why waiting lists – six million at the end of lockdown – were expected to surpass nine million next year.

It now seems that far fewer patients are coming forward. The number of people being diagnosed with illnesses such as cancer has fallen sharply, while the number of people dying at home has risen.

Eventually, Truss will have to reckon with the question of whether lockdown cost more lives than it saved. This is about the future, not the past. The NHS's fragility means we can expect more calls to lock down in the event that a new pathogen should strike. We need to be in a better position to assess the health risks of doing so. What are the consequences? Which interventions save the most lives? As more data emerges, answers must be found before new panic sets in.

The NHS in its current form is unlikely to survive the effects of lockdown. More capacity is badly needed, and pouring cash into the unreformed system has not worked. There was a time, before Tony Blair's premiership, when a government presiding over a struggling NHS could have been accused of starving it of money. Britain once lagged behind other developed countries in health spending. But it is no longer possible to argue this point. At the last count, Britain spent 13 per cent of its GDP on healthcare, more than any developed country other than the United States, itself often accused of running a very financially inefficient health system. Too many lives are at stake to ignore the need for reform.

For now Truss will have to get through this winter as best she can. As far as possible, her energy-bill bailout should be aimed at protecting the most vulnerable: that is to say, the over-eighties and those most likely to die of the cold. The economic issues she faces are huge, but so too are the risks of a collapsing health service. Protecting the old and infirm should be the first priority in whatever plan she has for the next few months.



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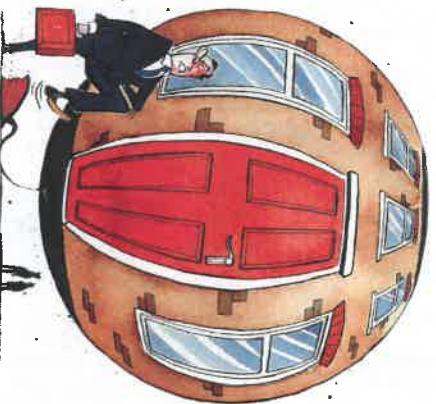
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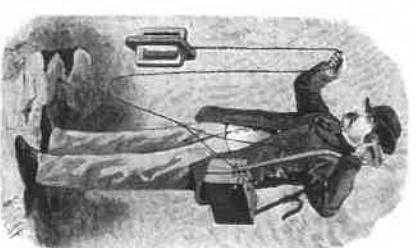
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CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Hollender is a civil servant and former chemistry teacher. She writes on p22 about why Help to Buy is too good to be true.

Thomas Graham is a journalist and microbiologist based in Bolivia. He writes about rumours of South American human sacrifice on p24.

Claire Lowdon is a former deputy editor of *Areté* magazine and author of the novel *Left of the Bang*. She reviews Ian McEwan's latest novel on p28.

Bryan Karetnyk, who writes about Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes on p32, is a translator and scholar of 20th-century Russian literature and culture.

Nigel Richardson is a journalist, ghost writer and author whose new book is *The Accidental Detective*. He writes about metal detecting on p50.

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The BBC, we were told, is invaluable and irreplaceable, and the performance ended with the full orchestra walking silently from the stage in the manner of Haydn's Farewell symphony, the better to evoke the existential threat that the Corporation currently faces from Market Forces, the Wicked Tories, or possibly Charles Moore.

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Looking back, I sacrificed myself for women's equality.

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PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

Liz Truss, the new Prime Minister, said in a speech outside 10 Downing Street: 'Boris Johnson delivered Brexit, the Covid vaccine and stood up to Russian aggression. History will see him as a hugely consequential prime minister.' For her part: 'I am confident that together we can ride out the storm.' Earlier, on being elected leader of the Conservative party, she had said: 'I know that we will deliver, we will deliver, we will deliver.' She had been elected by party members ahead of Rishi Sunak by 81,326 votes to 60,399 (57.4 per cent to 42.6). Turnout was 82.6 per cent. She travelled to Balmoral the next day to kiss hands as the 15th prime minister of the Queen's reign as soon as Boris Johnson, accompanied by his wife Carrie (who wore a magenta silk Dreamy maxi dress), had resigned his ministry to the Queen there. In his last speech as PM, standing outside No. 10, he said: 'Like Cincinnati, I am returning to my plough.' Priti Patel, the home secretary, had written to him the night before saying she would continue to serve the country from the back benches. Nadine Dorries also resigned, as culture secretary, to write more of her widely enjoyed novels.

Liz Truss appointed a cabinet. Therèse Coffey became Health Secretary with the title of Deputy Prime Minister; Kwasi Kwarteng was made Chancellor of the Exchequer; James Cleverly Foreign Secretary; Suella Braverman Home Secretary; Ben Wallace continued as Defence Secretary; Jacob Rees-Mogg became Business Secretary (with

responsibility for energy); Kemi Badenoch Trade Secretary; Penny Mordaunt leader of the Commons; Sir Robert Buckland was back, as Welsh Secretary; Tom Tugendhat was made Minister for Security and will attend the cabinet. There was nothing for Rishi Sunak. Energy supply companies prepared to take out government-backed loans to subsidise bills. The cost of freezing domestic bills for two years somewhere near the current price cap of an average £1,971 was put at £170 billion.

In England, the number of people testing positive for Covid fell to one in 60 and in Scotland to one in 55 by the last week in August (from one in 45 and one in 40 a week earlier) according to the Office for National Statistics. The number of people in the United Kingdom in hospital with Covid fell to about 7,500, from 9,000 a week earlier. A Pfizer vaccine was approved that targets the original coronavirus and the Omicron variant, along with a similar Moderna vaccine it will be made available for autumn vaccinations. Last weekend, 2,120 migrants reached England in small craft, bringing the total for the year to 27,415.

Abroad

Russia kept the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline to Germany closed after a three-day period of maintenance and said it would not be reopened until sanctions were lifted. 'Use of gas as a weapon will not change the resolve of the EU,' said Charles Michel, the President of the European Council. 'We will accelerate our path towards energy independence. Our duty

is to protect our citizens and support the freedom of Ukraine.' Germany announced a €65 billion package of measures to ease the effects of rising energy costs on its people. The *New York Times* reported that Russia had bought millions of artillery shells and rockets from North Korea. President Vladimir Putin of Russia made threatening noises about grain exports from Ukraine. Ukrainian forces regained towns near Kharkiv and Kherson. Thousands paid their respects to Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, whose body lay in the Pillared Hall of the House of Unions in Moscow; there was 'no space in the schedule' of Mr Putin to attend his funeral.

In a referendum, 61.9 per cent rejected a new constitution for Chile due to have replaced one drawn up under General Augusto Pinochet. The Ugandan parliament ordered the cancellation of the Nyege Nyege popular music festival in Jinja because it was, in the words of one MP, a 'breeding ground for sexual immorality'. Alcohol would be served at this year's World Cup in Qatar. The Dutch city of Haarlem decided to ban most advertisements for meat.

Ten were killed and 18 wounded in a stabbing spree in Saskatchewan province, Canada; a suspect was found dead and his brother pursued by police. Dozens of Islamist militants drowned in a river while fleeing government assaults in the Nigerian state of Borno. People in the Chinese city of Chengdu were prevented from fleeing their compounds during an earthquake because of a Covid lockdown. CSH

Angela Hartnett and Gordon Ramsay worked together for over 17 years. Spending this much time together, they got to know each other really well. One piece of wisdom always stuck with Angela. 'Gordon would constantly say 'Think of everyone as a VIP'. Coming from an Italian culture where guests are treated like family, this really resonated with me,' Angela explains. 'To me, it's more than making every customer feel like a regular, it's about treating everyone well regardless of who they are or what they do or where they come from. Which, when you think about it, is as important in life as it is in a Michelin Star restaurant'. Like Angela, we believe that the best advice comes from someone who knows you well. The kind of powerful good advice that you can expect from Evelyn Partners. Because we take the time to truly understand you. What motivates, inspires and drives you. To help you flourish.

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Angela Hartnett, Restaurateur

"Think of
everyone
as a VIP."

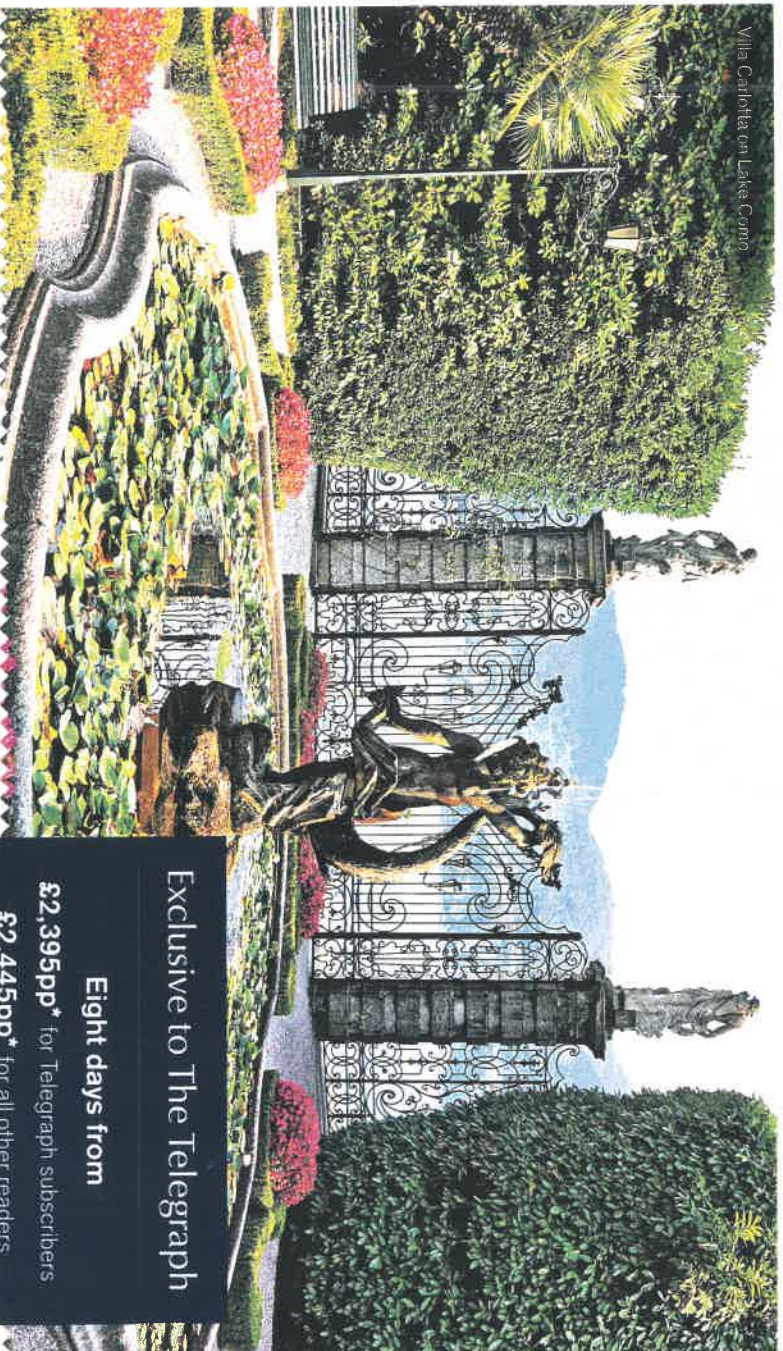
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About the expert

Helen Yemm, former author of The Telegraph's *Thorny Problems*, has written several books about gardening and is also a lecturer, teacher and broadcaster.

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DIARY

Robert Peston



Harford of *More or Less*. He remembers they studied 'Cantor's infinities, Peano arithmetic, Turing machines, all the good stuff'. But what about her? What does he remember? Nothing, it turns out. 'I am really much better at dealing with numbers than dealing with people I don't know well.' Given the economic crisis we're in, one hopes Truss too is better at dealing with numbers than people.

I ran into the new Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, on Tuesday. 'Thought you were in jail?' he said. Ah yes. The comedian Joe Lycett presented a painting of me behind bars to Laura Kuenssberg on the set of her new Sunday show. When I first saw it, I laughed.

The likeness, the absurdity. I have only admiration for Laura K (and hope she doesn't desire to see me incarcerated).

Kwasi Kwarteng, the new Chancellor, who is like a politician from a different age. First, he's written proper books – decent ones. Second, even on camera, he's prepared to engage in argument rather than dodging and diving. He has intellectual confidence. I've lost count of the number of women who go misty-eyed at his brilliance when reminiscing about meeting him years ago at parties. One thing's certain, when he and Truss talk about rejecting the Treasury orthodoxy, believe them. For the first time since the young Gordon Brown took office in 1997, the mandarins are going to struggle to contain a new chancellor. Some of my branny hedge-fund friends think that's a good thing. But that may be because they thrive on the kind of extreme markets and economic volatility which may not suit the rest of us.

The week began with the ten-year anniversary of the death of my wife, Siân Busby. It's funny how time works. The resignation of Boris Johnson seems an age away, the departure of Theresa May ancient history. But Siân's death from cancer on 4 September 2012 is yesterday to me. Politics matters. Work matters. But without us making any choice, the brain automatically ranks the events that shape us and change us. It turns out hugs are sometimes important, especially when you can't have them any more from the people you love.

Robert Peston presents *ITV's Peston* on Wednesdays at 10.45 p.m.

Liz Truss doesn't waste energy on unnecessary emotion. At the announcement of her victory at the Q&A Centre, she ditched the convention of hugging your partner and shaking hands with the runner-up. Instead she grabbed her notes from her husband Hugh.

O'Leary and marched past Rishi Sunak without a second glance. No time for sentimentality! Different from Johnson, surrounded by his siblings and ubiquitous father, or the uxorious Cameron and doing May. She knifed to the microphone with the same steely determination she showed all those decades ago when she told the Lib Dem conference to abolish the monarchy. The script has changed, the focus has not. Just before midnight on the first day of her regime, she rejected another convention: the showy buttering of POTUS. After her first telephone conversation with Joe Biden, she made no reference to the famous 'special relationship', the bond between the world's two richest anglophone nations, the shared history of challenging tyranny (some of the time). Instead Liz talked coolly of 'working together as leaders of free democracies to tackle shared challenges – particularly the economic problems caused by Putin's war'. Her pragmatism, her rejection of the conceit of 'specialness', is certainly refreshing. Whether colleagues and world leaders will find it bracing remains to be seen.

None of which is to say she is dull. I've chatted with assorted foreign secretaries over many years, and most – even Boris Johnson in his pomp – played the ball not the man. Truss cares less about diplomatic niceties. At a party last year, she responded to a technical point I was making about the UK's trade deal with the EU by calling me a 'walking cliché'. It's a badge I wear with pride.

At Oxford, she shared eight tutorials of my heroes: the BBC's magnificent debunker of statistical fallacies, Tim



'The most plumpious story-telling,'

Stephen Fry

CONFESSIONS

A LIFE OF FAILED PROMISES

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Truss's Downing Street refit

How 10 Downing Street works – or doesn't – always reflects the character of the prime minister who inhabits it. Boris Johnson's No. 10 was chaotic and scandal-ridden. Theresa May's indecision meant that hers was led by the will of her strong-minded advisers, not by her own agenda. David Cameron's was slick, but last-minute. Liz Truss served in government under all three of them, and so witnessed all three approaches. She wants her Downing Street to be different.

Even before Truss entered Downing Street on Tuesday, change was under way. After No. 10 earned a reputation in the past year as a louche place full of late-night drinking, aides have been told that the government is smartening up: there will be a shirt-and-tie dress code. But the more important change is structural. The old policy unit has been drastically slimmed down. The delivery unit, the data team and legislative affairs have been moved. In their place is a new economic unit whose role is to help Truss and her Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng take on the 'Treasury orthodoxy' that Truss spent so much of her leadership campaign railing against.

In a bid to strengthen the relationship between Truss and her most important ministers, new offices are being created in Downing Street for both Wendy Morton, the new chief whip, and Therèse Coffey, the Deputy Prime Minister. 'We've blown up the No. 10 floor plan,' says an aide. The idea is to create a leaner, nimbler operation. And slimming down doesn't just set an example to other departments; it's also intended to create higher accountability.

Truss views a new economic approach as crucial to her premiership. As well as appointing a like-minded Chancellor in her old friend Kwarteng, she wants No. 10 to have far more economic oversight. As such, Matthew Sinclair is joining as her chief economic adviser. Truss knows Sinclair from his thinktank days, when he was director of the Taxpayers' Alliance and specialised in attacking wasteful government spending.

History shows that such a move can lead to friction. Nigel Lawson quit as chancellor over Alan Walters's role as Margaret Thatcher's economic adviser. Aides believe Truss and Kwarteng are too closely aligned to have such issues (his mantra in the role is 'facilitate, not emasculate') and that he

too needs backup to fight Treasury officials who are instinctively opposed to the deficit-financed tax cuts which have become Truss's signature policy.

The No. 10 operation will be led by Mark Fullbrook, a political strategist who set up a business with Lynton Crosby. The appointment is not without criticism seeing as Fullbrook has little experience of government and isn't exactly a Truss loyalist. He worked for two of her leadership rivals this summer – Nadhim Zahawi, then Penny Mordaunt – before joining her team.

However, the view is that a senior figure (he's 60) was needed given the relative youth of Truss's longer standing aides. Fullbrook is regarded as a unifier, who is liked by many Tory MPs. 'He's good at boosting

Aides have been told that the government is smartening up: there will be a shirt-and-tie dress code

team morale,' says a colleague. 'He is happy to celebrate others' achievements.'

The Prime Minister's circle is tight-knit. Her advisers bonded over group dinners at Chevening – the country house used by foreign secretaries – as she made her plans for government. 'There are about ten aides with key roles,' says one member of Truss's inner circle. After the official victory party for supporters on Monday night in Cannon Street, Truss and her closest staff ended up going back to Admiralty House for a private drink. Already some MPs say they feel sidelined.

Loyalty has become a defining part of Truss's government. Her cabinet is largely

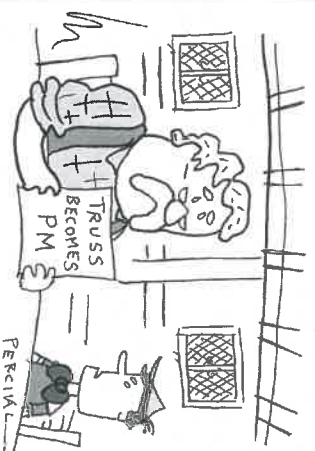
made up of those who backed her for the leadership and there are almost no Rishi Sunak supporters. The purge has upset those MPs who now think they will be left out in the cold. 'Her margin of victory wasn't huge. She should have acknowledged that and reached out,' says one who backed Sunak.

The preference for loyalty runs deeper still. Ministers have been told they cannot hire aides without approval from Fullbrook. Already some candidates have been vetoed.

If Truss appoints people she trusts, it should mean in theory that she will be able to devolve decisions. The restructure is meant to empower cabinet ministers. She would like most policy to come from departments, working closely on her clear instructions. Part of the reason for the slimming down of the No. 10 policy unit is a view that it creates policy for the sake of it.

Should the devolving fail, it will fall to her enforcer-in-chief to push things through: Zahawi, the new head of the Cabinet Office, who is a close ally of Fullbrook. The delivery unit is now under his watch, where he is reunited with the civil servant Emily Lawson, with whom he worked on the vaccine rollout. 'If Kwasi is going to be a chief finance officer, Zahawi will be a chief operating officer,' explains an ally. Zahawi has had to work quickly on a charm offensive given that many of the civil servants he has inherited feel rather snubbed to have been pushed out of No. 10. In Whitehall, proximity is regarded as power.

Trying to slim down the operation isn't a new idea. Lots of prime ministers have started off doing it, only to bulk up staff numbers as they run into problems. Some of Truss's supporters are speculating that the No. 10 roles will change before the year is out. But for now, she wants not just to lead by example but also to make sure that those around her are people she can rely on – the people who got her into No. 10 in the first place. If her approach goes to plan, her Downing Street will be hailed as a nimble and lean operation. If things start to go wrong, it will be criticised as short-staffed and inexperienced. With so many crises ahead, the verdict might not be long in coming.



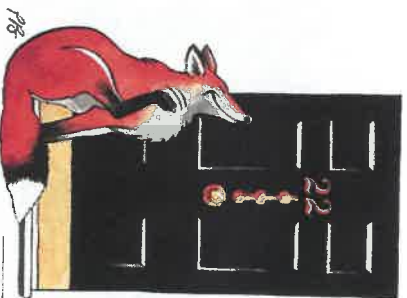
'I find her a bit wooden.'

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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore



As is now well known, Liz Truss has travelled politically. Her parents are left-wing, and there is a photograph of her as a child posing with them and their CND banner in Paisley. She herself was active in the Liberal Democrats. Professor Truss is reportedly upset that his daughter became a Conservative. I can identify with this story a little since both my parents were/are (my mother is still alive) ardent Liberals and I fear my own move to the right – though never really a party-political thing – upset them. Parents tend to be more upset by children moving to their right than to their left. This is because non-conservative politics is pseudo-religious. It sees political allegiance as a test of virtue and political programmes as means of salvation. If your child moves to your right, you may think it immoral and fear your darling has been corrupted by bad company. My Liberal parents were/are equally opposed politically to Labour and the Conservatives, but it was only the Tories they called ‘wicked’. For the offspring making the move, it is upsetting to upset one’s parents (even if one’s rebelliousness is partly intentional) but it may make one think harder about what politics is. Liz Truss’s change of allegiance may explain the relish which she brings to new policies – always testing, always searching.

There was mockery on the BBC because Boris and Liz Truss had to go to Balmoral to effect the change of prime minister. It was a waste of time to go so far to see the Queen, was the implication. I should have thought the sight of Deeside might assist calm reflection. It is also good for the Union that you can be made Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in Scotland.

The new Prime Minister shows herself an ‘ally’ of diversity by including among her appointees to the great offices of state a member of an increasingly marginalised minority, Old Elonians. When first a candidate in Spelthorne in the 2010 election, Kwasi Kwarteng was often stigmatised for this disadvantageous background. So he felt nervous when, in a supermarket car park, he was

approached by a tattooed, shaven-headed, middle-aged white man. ‘ere,’ the man said, ‘is it true you didn’t go to a normal school like us ordinary people: you was at Eton?’ Kwasi anxiously assented. ‘Good,’ said the man, ‘I don’t want the country run by bloody oiks.’

As I write, the new government is about to launch its plan for energy prices. Last week, our coal merchant Steve rang me. Would I like a big pile of coal? He was contacting his regular customers first, because from spring next year it will be illegal for him to sell the stuff. His price increase of about 15 per cent on my last load seemed deliciously low. I gratefully settled for as much as my cellar could fit. The coal ban will be seen by history as a small example of how our energy policy was blind to emerging realities, like the British guns facing the wrong way at Singapore.

Which brings me to the interesting case of Michael Gove, who is leaving frontline politics. In many ways, this was sad news. Gove was probably the most original and certainly the most experienced minister in the administration. Except for a short break, he was in the cabinet for 12 years, longer than giants of the past like Nigel Lawson or, come to think of it, Tony Blair or David Cameron. No one understood Whitehall better, was more helpful across departments, is more acute as an analyst of politics. He could also be bold, as his education policy and his decision to back Brexit proved. But somehow it all got too complicated and perhaps too driven by fashion. Possibly I over-obsess (who doesn’t, now?) about the excessive price

of energy, but on the subject of net zero, I feel that Gove, who even sought, as Defra secretary, to ban wood-burning stoves, neglected Enoch Powell’s famous dictum that ‘The supreme function of statesmanship is to provide against preventable evils’. Britain cannot unilaterally prevent the evil of climate change (if, indeed, it is evil), nor unite the world against it. It most certainly does have the power to provide against the evil of energy insecurity and consequent price vulnerability. Yet, backed by Michael Gove’s eloquence, it refused to do so.

This year’s AGM of the National Trust on 5 November will see a determined effort by the growing Restore Trust movement to challenge the extraordinary level of control exercised by the Trust’s management. The preparations already show how concerned that management is. Each candidate for the council has to submit a short manifesto. One, Philip Gibbs, who is backed by Restore Trust, was surprised to be told that his manifesto was being altered. A ‘governance support coordinator’ (the NT has numerous titles of this sort) emailed him attempting to water down his criticism of the proxy vote system by which the chairman can outvote resolutions he does not like. The governance man tried to make him say that it should be reviewed rather than abolished. Mr Gibbs refused.

Sometimes a phrase – ‘perfect storm’, ‘shock and awe’, ‘tipping point’ etc – gains currency and people overuse it. At present, the buzz phrase is ‘Overton window’. It is named after an American thinktanker, Joseph Overton, who, before his sadly premature death, devised it. The window is the range of mainstream ideas which the public will, at a given time, accept. Politicians who wish to change opinion must squeeze their policies to fit in this window. As a description of opinion, this may be a helpful concept, but as a rule of conduct, it is repressive. It suggests that a new idea can succeed only if smuggled in. It therefore discourages clear original thinking and encourages deception. Right now, when radical thinking is so needed, it is the opposite of an idea whose time has come.

Full throttle

Can Liz Truss grow the economy?

JAMES FORSYTH



Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng arrive in Downing Street having been on a long political journey together. Both elected in 2010, they have co-written books setting out their shared economic agenda; they have co-founded party groups during their time in parliament; and now they will govern together. The future direction of the country, and the Tories' electoral prospects, depend on the success of this new Downing Street partnership.

Their strategy is one of big economic gambles from day one. Chief among these is the big energy package, potentially costing over £100 billion, designed to 'freeze' energy prices for households and businesses. This will involve the state – future taxpayers, in other words – picking up the tab to protect today's consumers from the current high prices. It's an intervention on a par with furlough in both scale and cost, and will need to be financed with debt. It is bigger than anything the Blair or Cameron governments attempted. Truss's tax cut – reversing the National Insurance rise – is tiny by comparison to the energy-bill bailout.

The energy freeze is a pragmatic move, not an ideological one – having politicians determine the price of energy is hardly free-market policy. But most governments in Europe, whether left or right, will be doing something similar, and they all hope debt markets will stump up the cash at an affordable rate. Truss's hope is that a big bazooka approach to energy can give the government time and space to get going on the rest of its agenda.

The real start to her period in government will come later this month, with a budget (although it won't be called that) reversing the National Insurance increase and cancelling the planned corporation tax rise (from 19 per cent to 25 per cent). This marks a substantial fiscal loosening. The idea is that this stimulus will head off a recession.

Perhaps more striking is what isn't on the

new Prime Minister's priority list: spending cuts. A number of Tories dared to hope that with Boris Johnson gone, the profligacy of the last few years would cease – yet Truss and Kwarteng seem happy to fund hugely expensive measures through borrowing. It's a dramatic shift from Truss's earlier political career: in 2009 she was writing pamphlets about what could be cut in the aftermath of the financial crash, while Kwarteng would suggest throughout the Cameron and Osborne years that the Tories were too slow in reducing the deficit. Now, the hope is

Truss and Kwarteng seem happy to fund hugely expensive measures through borrowing

that the economic growth stimulated by tax cuts and reform will make massive government spending affordable.

To understand the scale of the gamble, consider the latest Bank of England forecasts. The Bank envisages the UK economy flatlining for years, with no growth to speak of. To Truss, this reflects the burden of high taxes – the highest since the 1950s. But state spending is now so big (and about to get bigger with the energy-bill bailouts) that making a meaningful difference is hard. When Truss and Kwarteng first entered parliament, few would have expected them to be dramatically intervening in the energy markets and borrowing huge sums to boost growth.

Yet their shift towards being more relaxed about debt represents a wider move in thinking on the economy within the Tory party. There is a general frustration about the rising tax burden and a growing feeling that this trajectory must change immediately, regardless of circumstance. Kwarteng has been known to warn that if things stay the same, then Britain will end up with a 'neo-Butskellite consensus' on economic management.

The Truss-Kwarteng solution is to move away from traditional fiscal conservatism: to cut taxes, borrow more and reform the economy, hoping that growth will pay for the borrowing. Thatcher's allusions to household finances are out, replaced by confident assertions that the markets are more forgiving nowadays and the British state has the flexibility to borrow what it wants, and at low rates.

James Carville, Bill Clinton's political point man, once joked that he wanted to be reincarnated as the bond market because 'you can intimidate everybody'. But during both the financial crash and Covid, developed economies managed to borrow unprecedented sums of money without seeing their borrowing rates (or gilt yields) spiking. This began to change the thinking about what was and was not possible. Suddenly the bond market intimidated nobody.

So the political calculation shifted: if you could borrow money to shut down the economy, why not borrow money to reform it? In a Tory party with a big-spending prime minister in the shape of Boris Johnson, this idea became increasingly popular – despite former chancellor Rishi Sunak's insistence that major spending projects had to be paid for. Kwarteng and Truss haven't set out any spending projects they'd cut. Indeed, they are committed to raising defence spending. But they are both agreed that the priority is not raising taxes – and that if the deficit has to rise, so be it.

Under Cameron, taming the deficit was presented as the defining mission of conservative economics. Truss derides the traditional Treasury insistence on 'making sure that tax and spend add up' as 'abacus economics'. Not so long ago, Tories would liken an approach such as hers to believing in a 'magic money tree' – it was the main weapon used to attack Labour. Such language is unlikely to be heard now.

So the big question remains: will the markets wear it? Advocates of Trussonomics are confident that the extra deficit will be seen as a price worth paying for a transition to a lower-tax economy. The boost in growth, they say, will strengthen the public finances in the medium term. Others have a more basic argument about why the UK will be able to borrow so much for so long: markets are crashing, there is a glut of money which has to go somewhere, and the UK only has to avoid being the winner of the ugly-baby

The UK government is paying 3.1 per cent on its debt, treble the rate of interest a year ago

contest to meet its borrowing needs. Considering the West's broader problems – such as European gas prices – that should not be too difficult to achieve.

The danger is that market sentiment can change quickly. Think back to Black Wednesday in 1992, which saw the Tories lose their reputation for economic competence. It took a generation to regain that trust. These days the UK isn't in an exchange-rate mechanism or tied to another currency. But that doesn't mean it is exempt from risks. The UK government is having to pay 3.1 per cent on the money it borrows, treble the rate of interest a year ago. If it rises much further, this will trigger concern because the UK is very sensitive to even relatively small moves in the cost of servicing its debt. Britain spent £5.8 billion on debt interest in July alone, up 63 per cent on the same month last year.

Can reform speed up growth? George Osborne cut corporation tax in the hope that this would stimulate business investment, but the response was disappointing. Truss has long been a believer in deregulation – the reform she talked about in her opening speech in Downing Street. As a junior minister, she pushed hard for rolling back burdens on business, only to be thwarted by the limits of coalition. Her decision to appoint Jacob Rees-Mogg as Business Secretary suggests she is serious about pursuing these kinds of reforms now that she is in charge.

Deregulation is politically difficult. Boris Johnson had an 80-seat majority but was forced to abandon planning reform when Tory backbenchers took fright after the party's defeat in the Chesham and Amersham by-election. Planning reform is what could

On the Fellowship of Young Poets

for A.J. and N.C.

*An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman
walk into a bar... cheap joke, how it began
one ancient evening on the lash in Leeds.*

Three likely lads, fresh from writing degrees, thinking they knew it all and next to nowt at once, as if the margins of hope and doubt were clear as the angles on the pool table they'd gathered round. Watch them now, unable to imagine, as youth will, what's up ahead, each smoothly potting the yellows or reds in the backroom of a pub's smoky haze. You want to tell them these are the best days, aren't they, but this is only a memory, now the baize is cleared for one final whisky.

– Ben Wilkinson

have the biggest impact on growth. Truss is known to be keen on building. But it is hard to imagine Tory MPs backing anything too radical this close to a general election and with a leader who does not have an explicit electoral mandate to build more homes.

There is also the question of jobs. It's already relatively easy to hire and fire in Britain and, as George Osborne found with the Beecroft review, it's hard to further deregulate without being accused of debasing workers' rights. The direction of travel – with Uber and other workers in the gig economy – has been in the other direction, with employers accused of cheating workers out of holiday entitlements and sick pay. Rees-Mogg's critics will not be shy of accusing him of holding workers in contempt.

Truss thinks this argument is winnable: she has spoken of 'Uber-riding, Airbnb-ing, Deliveroo-eating freedom fighters'. But will she be willing to spend so much political capital in order properly to deregulate? Former Tory ministers (of whom there is now no shortage) say such reforms will be difficult if voters are fretting about their own job security. Moreover, the Tory electoral coalition now includes more working-class voters than it did in 2010.

Truss, however, has long argued against the idea that red-wall voters want Labour-like policies. She is convinced that this is a fundamental misreading of the political climate,

and what that section of the electorate really wants is radical change and distinctively Conservative policies.

The Truss-Kwarteng approach means that the Tories are, at least in the short term, setting aside fiscal conservatism. They'll not be able to talk about a 'black hole' in Labour financial plans. Starmer will be able to argue that Labour would also borrow to boost growth but that the money would be spent differently: on universal child care, say, rather than tax cuts. The danger for the Tories is that they end up being outbid by Labour.

But Truss didn't campaign as a fiscal conservative and she won't govern as one. Instead, she argued that the Tories have been unduly constrained by fear of the markets and the 'Treasury orthodoxy' of balancing budgets; and that extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.

There is no shortage of problems facing Truss and Kwarteng. There is the NHS crisis, the small-boat crossings making a mockery of the government's claim that it controls Britain's borders, the tension rising over the Northern Ireland Protocol. Add to that the obvious international difficulties: an ongoing war on Europe's eastern front and an increasingly aggressive China.

The new government will struggle to persuade the public it can handle such issues if its signature economic policy – borrowing to fund tax cuts that boost growth – does not pay off.

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

Tom Holland



I have done absolutely nothing this past year except pound away at a book.

For complicated logistical reasons that are far too boring to go into, I discovered last summer – rather in the manner of a Bank of England economist blindsided by the inflation rate – that I had badly miscalculated how long I had to finish it. A deadline that I had initially thought was February 2023 turned out to be July 2022. As a result, I have done nothing these past 12 months except write about the Romans. I have incinerated the Temple of Jerusalem, destroyed Pompeii, inaugurated the Colosseum and built Hadrian's Wall. What I have not done, however, is much exercise – and so no sooner had I breastied the tape of my deadline than I was off for a 20-mile walk across London.

The capital is so infinite in its fascinations that during the lockdown my wife and I found our appetite for travel perfectly satisfied by going for long, themed treks across the immensity of its sprawl. The theme for last weekend's walk was animals. We visited London Zoo, of course, but also a farm in Vauxhall and a riding school in Brixton. At the Tower of London we remembered in our prayers the elephant kept there by James I and which, poor creature, was never given anything to drink but wine. At Gough Square we paid our respects to Hodge, Dr Johnson's beloved cat, and at Carlton House Terrace to Giro, a dog owned by Hitler's first ambassador to London, and which, after an accident with a rogue electricity cable, was buried at the top of the steps leading to the Mall.

Most moving of all was the memorial in Park Lane to the recipients of the PDSA Dickin Medal: the animals' equivalent of the Victoria Cross. Among those who had helped to fund the memorial, I noted, was the late Charlie Watts.

government – distracted though it may be, I acknowledge, by other matters – will take urgent steps to close it.

The species of animal that has won the most Dickin Medals – more even than the dog – is the humble pigeon. I was delighted but not remotely surprised to discover this. I have sat at the feet of Gordon Coreia, the BBC's security correspondent, and learned from him that pigeons are 'the true superheroes of history'. Their astonishing homing ability – still not properly understood by scientists – has enabled them to do humans noble service since the time of Noah. (A dove, as Gordon has memorably put it, is merely 'a pigeon with good PR'.)

A few weeks ago, he came on *The Rest Is History*, the podcast I present with my friend Dominic Sandbrook, and brilliantly made his case. British pigeons, dismissed by far too many of us as rats with wings, have served their country bravely and well, and splendidly merit our admiration. Kenley Lass, the first pigeon to deliver intelligence from occupied France; Winkle, who saved a ditched aircrew in 1942; Mary of Exeter, who braved shrapnel and Nazi hawks to complete her missions: heroes one and all. Alarmingly, however, we have allowed the National Pigeon Service to fall into abeyance. Unlike China or France, we have failed to invest in the solar-flare-proof long-distance communications that only pigeons can provide. As a result, we are confronted by what Gordon, in sombre tones, has termed the 'pigeon gap'. I hope that the new

It is the measure of how hard I have been working that I even had to put cricket with my team, the Authors, on hold. Thankfully, I finished in time to play at one of the most atmospheric grounds in the whole of England: Erteloke in Wiltshire. Built inside the walls of what was once an Edwardian garden, it is the love child of L.P. Hartley and Frances Hodgson Burnett.

The ground was as beautiful as ever, the match an absolute thriller, and the hospitality quite gloriously wine-soaked. Yet wonderful a day though it was, I could not help but feel there was a slight summer-of-1914 feel to the whole occasion. Had there been ladies with white parasols and moustachioed gentlemen muttering about some damn-fool business in the Balkans, I would not have been surprised. Winter is coming. These past three years have taught us to dread what it can bring. For decades, our medicines and our energy supplies enabled us to forget what countless generations of our ancestors, reaching back to the very beginnings of human habitation on this island, could never afford to forget: that cold and darkness kill. So I felt happy to be playing cricket again, not just because I had missed it, but also because I knew that the memory of it will serve me, this coming winter, to warm my spirits and my hopes.

Tom Holland is the author of *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*.

ROD LIDDLE

The BBC's new direction



I am becoming terribly worried about the people of Sunderland with regard to how they will cope in this coming winter. The greatly increased fuel bills will affect all parts of the country, of course – but none more so than the Mackems who, I suspect, will largely die as a consequence. Their particular problem was highlighted by the local Labour MP, Bridget Phillipson, on BBC2's *Politics Live* hosted by the excellent Jo Coburn. Ms Phillipson said people in her constituency opened their doors to her wearing their coats and possibly mufflers, because they were trying to reduce their energy bills. The temperature up here has not dropped below about 21°C for the past two months, but these Mackems are apparently already close to hypothermia. So how will they cope when December descends?

I live about 30 miles away and have been dressed in nothing more than a T-shirt since June and our central heating went off at the end of March. Perhaps the people of Houghton and Sunderland South are actually cold-blooded creatures and would be better served by basking on rocks during the daylight hours, rather than hiding inside their dark, freezing homes. Or maybe the taxpayer should provide them with a giant vivarium. An alternative explanation is that as soon as these people see Phillipson approaching they quickly throw a coat on in an attempt to convince her that they are just on their way out to meet a friend, or go to the betting shop, and do not have time to engage with her myopic and supercilious analyses of political issues.

Politics Live is one of the current affairs programmes that the BBC does well: it is intelligent, even-handed and free from the Chicken Little hysteria which affects many political discussion shows. *Newsnight*, remarkably, is another – which is not something one has been able to say for a very long time. In its previous incarnation, as a kind of broadcasted Hampstead Garden Suburb slip page of the *Guardian*, it lost an unfathomable number of viewers. Down from nigh on one million at the turn of the previous decade to well below 300,000 (indeed 200,000, according to an insider) before its awful editor Esme Wren and its chief presenter Emily Maitlis departed.

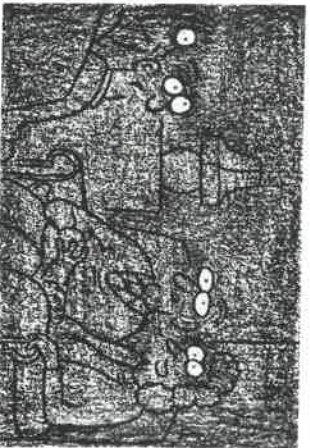
The production team during those years seemed to consist in the main of not terribly bright adolescent children, and the programme revelled in a fashionable north-London loathing for the Tories and knew very well which side of the culture war it was on. With contributors such as the egotistical leftie Lewis Goodall and, for a while, the genuinely whacko, Trot Paul Mason, it made not the slightest attempt to appear neutral, and warnings wrung out of the BBC were paid no heed.

Confronted with shows consisting of four angry women, including Maitlis, all agreeing with each other about how beastly right-wing people are, the viewers got the hell out: *Newsnight* become the perfect example of

Sue Barker was told by the BBC to sign a statement saying that she was leaving 'for the good of the show'

that cliché, go woke, go broke. Had it been in the private sector Wren and Maitlis would have been given the heave-ho years before – but instead it existed in a bubble of rather smug self-approval. In the end the only people left watching were those 200,000 who spend most of their day shrieking abuse on Twitter. Now, under a new editor and with Kirsty Wark and Mark Urban presenting, it is once again sharp and imaginative and at last possessed of a modicum of balance. It will be interesting to see if the viewers return.

The departee Maitlis (and indeed Lewis Knowall) are now doing some sort of podcast. In a valedictory address she alleged that



'Ron and I have decided to conserve our electricity for the festive season.'

the BBC was controlled by an evil, secret cabal of Tories – by which one assumes she meant that Robbie Gibb is on the BBC board. It is a testament to Emily's journalistic prowess that she was able to unearth virtually the only Conservative involved with the BBC. But for Emily and those 200,000 twittering viewers, even one Tory is too many. The liberal middle-class left runs about every institution in the country but when just one right-winger is appointed to any public body, the leftie toys are flung out of the pram and the dummy is spat out on to the Mexican granite floor tiles.

Still, as one BBC institution, *Newsnight*, heads in the right direction, plenty of others are determined to commit hara-kiri – and none more so than the previously much-loved *A Question of Sport*. Two years ago the BBC announced that Sue Barker, the presenter for 24 years, was 'standing down' because they intended to take the show in a 'new direction'. Well, they certainly have. Remarkably, Barker was told by the BBC to sign a statement saying that she was leaving 'for the good of the show' – but to her immense credit she told them to get stuffed. The presenter pronounced herself 'insulted', as well she might.

I found this out from her newly published autobiography where she also makes it pretty clear that Cliff Richard never actually gave her one, as I had long suspected. Anyway, that is beside the point I suppose. The BBC attempted to make it look as if Barker had made the decision herself – in other words, it engaged in precisely the same sort of deceit that it deployed when it tried to stop people singing jingoistic songs at the Last Night of the Proms in 2020. Back then they attempted to blame the conductor.

So, that 'new direction'? *A Question of Sport*, when presented by Barker and with Phil Tufnell and Matt Dawson as team captains, pulled in between four and five million viewers. With Paddy McGuinness presenting and the team captains Sam Quek and Ugo Monye, the ratings have fallen to... 850,000. Awesome – even Esme Wren must envy that. The BBC seemingly does not care what its audience wants and is forever pandering to da kidz. Da good news is da kidz hate it too.

Plough boy



On retiring from

office, Boris Johnson described himself as a sort of Cincinnatus, returning to his plough. This famous story attracted two comments from the media, both missing the point.

According to the historian Livy (c.59 BC–17 AD), when Rome's last king, the tyrannical Tarquinius Superbus – 'the arrogant' – was ejected in 509 BC, those who had acted as his advisers (patricians, i.e. senators) assumed control. But conflict soon emerged between them and the plebeians over problems of freedom, poverty and debt. By refusing to co-operate with the senators, especially by refusing to wage war, the plebs eventually won the right to appoint tribunes from among their number to try to solve the problems in the plebs' interests, with mixed success.

In 458 BC Rome found itself in serious military trouble – so serious that even the plebs realised the safety of Rome was in doubt. So despite the tribunes' protests, two armies were raised, and a filthy, sweating Cincinnatus was summoned from ploughing his three-acre farm – or was it digging a ditch? – to put on his toga and appear before the senate. He was given total power as dictator for six months to deal with the crisis. It took him 15 days to defeat the enemy, at which point he went back to his farm and resumed ploughing (or digging).

On the *Today* programme, Dame Mary Beard said that the 'sting in the tail' was that Cincinnatus was no lover of the poor. But how is that relevant to the story? Others pointed out that in 439 BC Cincinnatus was again called out of retirement, much against his will, to deal with what was described as a potential coup, namely someone bribing the poor with free grain (presumably the explanation of Dame Mary's 'sting in the tail'). Was this, then, the implication of Mr Johnson's reference, that he would at some stage return? But even if it was, Cincinnatus still resigned again, this time after 21 days. So that does not work either.

This tale is what Romans called an *exemplum*: a story from the past useful for discussing moral problems. So what did Mr Johnson mean by it? Does it even fit him?

— Peter Jones

Power of persuasion

How to tackle illegal migration

ALASDAIR PALMER

Immigration policy is a mess. For at least the past decade, it has been characterised by unrealistic targets and broken promises. Every government has promised to reduce dramatically the number of foreigners who arrive here in search of work, or justice, or hope. Every government has failed. The numbers keep going up. David Cameron promised to reduce immigration to below 100,000 a year. So did Theresa May. Boris Johnson claimed his version of Brexit would see immigration fall precipitously. None of them came close to keeping their word.

Curbing immigration, both legal and illegal, is an immensely difficult problem, so perhaps it is not surprising that successive governments have failed. What is surprising is the stupidity of many of the policies which they have claimed would succeed.

In April, Johnson announced that his solution to the growing problem of illegal immigration was that the Royal Navy would take control of monitoring migrants crossing the Channel. The Navy would intercept the

The threat that an illegal migrant will be detained is increasingly empty; there is nowhere to put them

boats, rescue the passengers and take them to England, where it would be determined whether they were entitled to stay.

The policy has had the opposite effect to the one intended: far from deterring people-smugglers, it encouraged them. Since it was announced there have been more, not fewer, boats of migrants attempting to cross the Channel, and in less seaworthy boats. People-smugglers can offer places in overcrowded boats knowing that those boats will be picked up by Navy ships and the migrants taken safely to England. From a people-smuggler's point of view, and indeed from an illegal migrant's, what's not to like? Once they get to the UK, many migrants picked up from boats in the Channel don't wait to find out whether they are entitled to settle here. They just disappear into the black economy.

The idea of using the Navy to reduce the number of illegal migrants crossing the Channel is almost – but not quite – as silly as the idea of transporting illegal immigrants to Rwanda. The chance of that working is close

to zero. Legal challenges will almost certainly prevent the policy getting off the ground. Britain's High Commissioner to Rwanda advised against it, on the grounds that Rwanda had been recruiting refugees to fight wars in neighbouring countries. Should any migrants actually be transferred from Britain to Rwanda, there is a good chance that they will suffer maltreatment at the hands of their hosts. It is not difficult to imagine what the courts will make of that.

And yet Liz Truss insists that she is committed to the policy. She has said she thinks it will act as a deterrent. It won't. For deportation to Rwanda to work as a deterrent, thousands would have to be transferred there – and that is not going to happen. Illegal migrants to the UK have anyway worked out how to avoid being deported to Rwanda: don't claim asylum, just slip away before you are 'processed'.

Truss has also said she will 'work with other countries to get new deals to find new locations' for Britain's illegal migrants. Well good luck with that. Rwanda was not the Home Office's first choice. Officials tried just about everywhere else, but no other country was interested.

Truss's promise to get the French to 'deal with backlogs' by being 'very clear and robust in my negotiations' is no more likely to yield results. The failure of the French to implement the border policies we want them to has many causes. But the one thing that is certain is that it is not because British politicians have so far failed to be 'clear and robust' in their negotiations with them.

The Home Office manages to combine crazy impractical policies with a determination not to do the one relatively simple thing that could actually reduce illegal immigration: deport illegal migrants back to their home countries. It doesn't have to involve forcible deportation, and it usually doesn't; most are persuaded by a combination of the offer of cash from the Home Office if they go, and the threat of being detained if they do not. But what matters is the likelihood of getting caught and then sanctioned. A few isolated cases won't have any deterrent effect.

Fewer than 8,500 illegal migrants were forcibly or voluntarily returned by the Home Office to their native countries in 2020. The number persuaded to leave the UK for the

year to March this year went up to more than 11,000. But in 2013, just eight years earlier, the figure was close to 47,000 – four times as many. And 2013 was not an exceptional year: the previous four each saw more than 40,000 illegals persuaded to leave the UK, as did the years 2014 to 2016. The number started to fall significantly in 2017, and dropped consistently for the next two years. Then in 2020, it went off a cliff: a measly 8,374, more than 11,000 fewer than in 2019.

Some of this fall was due to the effect of Covid lockdowns, but by no means all of it – as the figure for the year to March 2022 shows. There has indeed been an increase in the number of illegal migrants who returned home. But the most recent figure still only amounts to one quarter of the number who returned home in 2013 – which is what it would have been if there had been no Covid, and the numbers had fallen from 2020 at the same rate as they did between 2017 and 2019.

Again, not all of those who are recorded as going back do so as a result of some form of intervention by the Home Office. But by far the majority do. And generally, the two are linked: the more illegal migrants who go home because the Home Office helps them to do so, the more who eventually go home independently of intervention.

Unfortunately, the Home Office has been

quietly demolishing the infrastructure needed to persuade illegals to return home. There are fewer people working in Immigration Enforcement, and less money available for it as the government devotes more to doily projects. £120 million has already been paid to the Rwandan government – an amount which represents about half of the entire budget devoted to Immigration Enforcement.

That department has not been abolished, but it has been diminished. Persuasion requires credible threats, and credible threats require detention spaces: illegal migrants have to be served with a letter threatening

Truss has said she plans to increase the Border Force by 20 per cent, but that is nothing like enough

them with deportation, then held for three days before deportation procedure starts. Six years ago, there were 4,500 detention spaces – not nearly enough. But now there are fewer than 2,500. The threat that an illegal migrant will be detained is increasingly empty: there is simply nowhere to put them. Illegal migrants identified by the Home Office are still issued with the letter threatening deportation – and then nothing happens. They are given the opportunity to disappear into the black economy. And most of them take it.

Truss has said she plans to increase the Border Force by 20 per cent. That would be better than continuing to run it down – but it's nothing like enough to ensure that most illegal immigrants are persuaded to leave Britain, which requires increasing the Border Force by at least 100 per cent, something which is not going to happen while Truss is Prime Minister. Why? Because all the Home Office's spare cash is going to be devoted to a futile attempt to transfer Britain's illegal migrants to Rwanda.

Using Home Office officials to identify illegal migrants and then persuade them to go home is a lot simpler than transporting them to Rwanda or asking the Royal Navy to intercept boats in the Channel. It is also a great deal more effective. That the Home Office is only managing to persuade one quarter of the number of illegals it was 'helping' to return home a decade ago suggests that Priti Patel, the outgoing Home Secretary, has been deluded about what needs to be done to reduce illegal immigration. Let us hope that Suella Braverman, her replacement, will change that situation. Because as long as the delusion persists, immigration policy will remain an ineffective mess. And immigration, both legal and illegal, will keep going up.

Alasdair Palmer is a former Home Office speech writer.

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Green screen

The eco-group that tells broadcasters what to do

AUSTIN WILLIAMS

Britain's film and TV industries want to help save the world. That's hardly news. But one organisation is ensuring the industry focuses its efforts on environmental sustainability: Albert, which also goes by the name of Bafra Albert.

You might have seen the logo – a black footprint – at the end of many TV programmes, from BBC's *Newsnight* to Sky Sports News. It's a rapidly expanding body that few people other than industry insiders have heard of. But Albert is increasingly influential in determining how media institutions programme content, conduct their working practices and set their goals.

It describes itself as an environmental organisation which aims to encourage TV and film companies to reduce their carbon footprint. 'We are leading a charge against climate change,' it says. One of its big initiatives is Planet Placement – effectively introducing subliminal messaging. The unspoken idea is that almost everyone in broadcasting must accept Albert's worldview. In many ways, it is the Stonewall of Sustainability.

How did this happen? In 2010, Albert was founded by the BBC to provide a carbon calculator for the film and TV industry. Its name was proposed alongside another carbon-savings software package called Victoria.

At its launch the following year, BBC Vision's Sally Debonnaire said that producers who want to 'reduce their company's energy bills no longer have to worry if they don't know where to start'. Albert would do the hard work: providing spreadsheets, targets, training programmes and online tools to help companies be more environmentally friendly. One of its training packages is described as 'an opportunity for all those in the TV industry to explore how to use authenticity and creativity to prevent the end of the #<\$ing world'. Production companies quickly signed up to demonstrate their sustainable credentials. All BBC, ITV, Channel 4, UKTV, Sky and Netflix productions in the UK are now required to register their carbon footprint using Albert's calculator.

In the past decade, Albert has grown into a media machine and is now a subsidiary of Bafra. Its overriding message is that broadcasters have a duty to change the public's environmental attitudes and behaviour.

At COP26, the UN climate change conference in Glasgow last year, a series of

debates held in conjunction with Albert set out the terms of acceptable broadcasting. Broadcasters were encouraged to sign a pledge to make environmentalism central to their activities. This included a commitment to 'reach more of our audiences with content that helps everyone understand and navigate the path to net zero', and inspires them to make greener choices'; to 'develop processes that help us to consider climate themes when... commissioning, developing and producing content'; and to 'recognise the importance of fair and balanced representations of visions for a sustainable future'.

What broadcasters have agreed to is a promise to ensure the correct message filters through to an unsuspecting public. Sky, together with the Behavioural Insights Team (or 'Nudge Unit' as it was known when it was set up in 2010 by David Cameron's gov-

All BBC, ITV, Channel 4, UKTV and Sky productions are required to register their carbon footprint

ernment), claims that 75 per cent of people support 'TV broadcasters "nudging" viewers to think about the environment, whether that's through documentaries, advertising or increasing the coverage of environmental issues in the news'. Channel 4's Krishnan Guru-Murthy has recently been announced as chair of the Albert news consortium. He has been enlisted to 'explore how the climate change conversation is represented on screen'. Broadcasters must now take into consideration whether their output fits with Albert's principles. So much for impartiality.

By buying into Albert's mission, the broadcast media have agreed to combine forces to make sure their output, from soap operas to news, sport to children's cartoons,

puts the planet into programme content.

'Collectively, our industry reaches millions of people every single day. That represents an unprecedented opportunity to shift mindsets... It's a chance to shape society's response to climate change,' says Albert. The broadcasters agree: 'We believe broadcasters have a clear role and responsibility to encourage lifestyle changes,' said Dana Strong, CEO of Sky Group. As an example of where this leads, in the run-up to COP26, the producers of *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *Doctors*, *Emmerdale*, *EastEnders*, *Holly City* and *Hollyoaks* worked together on a climate-change storyline.

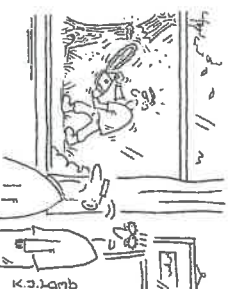
But Albert's influence doesn't stop there. Production houses can join its certification scheme, in which their company is tracked, traced, monitored and advised on how to do better. The resulting certificate has up to three stars. (*Birds of a Feather*, for example, has been awarded two stars; *Loose Women*, three.) As Albert says: 'This is the only possible way our industry can move forward.'

The war movie *1917* was the first large-scale UK film to gain a three-star Albert certification. It earned this for, among other things, digging trenches sensitively to 'ensure that as little damage was done to the land and biodiversity as possible', as well as the hair and make-up department minimising landfill 'by using bamboo toothbrushes and biodegradable wipes'.

Scripts can also receive praise. *I May Destroy You* was commended for an episode which, Albert says, deals with 'how the climate movement engages with black people and black communities and highlight(s) some of the hypocrisies that can lie at the heart of the climate movement when it's being pushed by privileged middle-class white people'. As for *Love Island*, Albert applauds the 'tactical placement' of 'personalised, reusable bottles... so much so that over 260,000 bottles were purchased by fans from the latest series alone'.

Albert exerts a huge amount of power in the world of TV and film production. But how many viewers are even aware of its existence, or the rise of 'Planet Placement'? It may come as news to discover that Albert is in the director's chair.

Austin Williams is director of the Future Cities Project thinktank.



'He's offsetting his cancelled flight by cutting down a tree.'

DOUGLAS MURRAY

The diversity myth



Great offices of state set to contain no white men' was the way one national newspaper reported the formation of the first Truss cabinet. In addition to Liz Truss the positions of Chancellor, Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary would respectively be held by Kwasi Kwarteng, James Cleverly and Suella Braverman.

Of course, all this was presented as something incredibly new and exciting: real progress at work. In fact it isn't remotely new. As Chancellor, Kwarteng follows those two famous white men Rishi Sunak and Nadhim Zahawi. As Home Secretary, Braverman succeeds Priti Patel and Sajid Javid. And now that Truss is Prime Minister she is the first woman to relieve us from male-dominated rule for a full three years. Also, after Theresa May, thank God a woman is back in charge, eh?

Nevertheless the diversity lobby remains ecstatic at the sheer diverseness of it all. Sunder Katwala, who runs a group called British Future, told the *Times*: 'The most striking thing is how ordinary and extraordinary it is at the same time. This is an extraordinary pace of change even in two or three years, never mind a decade.' And needless to say that is the only way to talk about this. The more the dastardly white man recedes into the background, the more positive change we will be undergoing. It reminds me of Ken Livingstone when he was mayor of London once telling me how thrilled he was that something like a third of Londoners were born outside of the UK. You got the distinct impression that he wouldn't be happy until absolutely everybody in capital was not born in Britain.

All of this, naturally, is laced with false presumptions. For example, there is the notion that being a female leader is in some way better than being a male one. There are three reasons that somebody might think – or pretend to think – this. First, that since men have had the field for so long it is time to give women a turn, second, that the only post-war PM with any *cojones* was Margaret Thatcher and so the more female prime ministers you elect, the more likely you are to get another Thatcher; third – the view I call Christine Lagarde-ism – that women

are the same as men and also magically better (Lagarde, you may remember, often said that if Lehman Brothers had been Lehman Sisters, the crash of 2008 might never have happened. Because as every man reading this will know, women are preternaturally incapable of spending money unwisely.)

But the diversity cult has other presumptions too. It supposes that people who are not white bring some other types of perspective to their roles. 'Diversity is our strength' has long been one of the *Pravda*-style mantras of our era. Yet while diversity may bring some benefits, they are certainly not endless.

Nor is diversity necessarily transmitted through skin pigmentation. Kwarteng, for instance, was educated at Colet Court, Eton and Cambridge. Is it likely that he

Kwarteng's ideas will reflect the education he received. His race will have nothing to do with it

will bring a whole new set of insights to his new post by dint of his 'diversity'? I would be surprised. Kwasi's parents came to the UK from Ghana, and if the diversity lobby believe it would be advantageous were he to bring some Ghanaian economics to the mix, I have some history to tell them. Most likely Kwarteng's ideas will reflect the education he received. His race will have nothing to do with it.

In any case, this is all such patronising rubbish. We have already had three years of



"Try turning it off and turning it off again."

Boris Johnson boasting about appointing the most diverse cabinet ever. And now it looks as if we are going to have another few years of Tories boasting about how wildly diverse they are. They will keep pointing out that Labour has never been led by anyone other than a white man. And yet despite all this, Labour MPs will still accuse the government of institutional racism. The entire Conservative party could to a man and woman be the product of Ghanaian parents and the whiter-than-white Labour would not change its line.

But there is another aspect of the diversity issue that needs to be mentioned – and that is the vast demoralising effect it has on the portion of the British population who are still the majority in this country. One of the problems with the more-diversity-the-better mantra is that it makes white people, and white men in particular, feel like they are not just a problem but *the* problem. As though their main task in life is to get out of the way. Many prominent race hucksters across this country actually say as much: because white men did so many things in the past, white men today must step aside and allow other people to take positions of power. Of course, they will not be expected to step aside when it comes to tasks such as road-laying, pylon-fixing, refuse-collecting or any number of other low-income, low-esteem jobs. White men will still be permitted to do them. But in the rest of life it is time to back off.

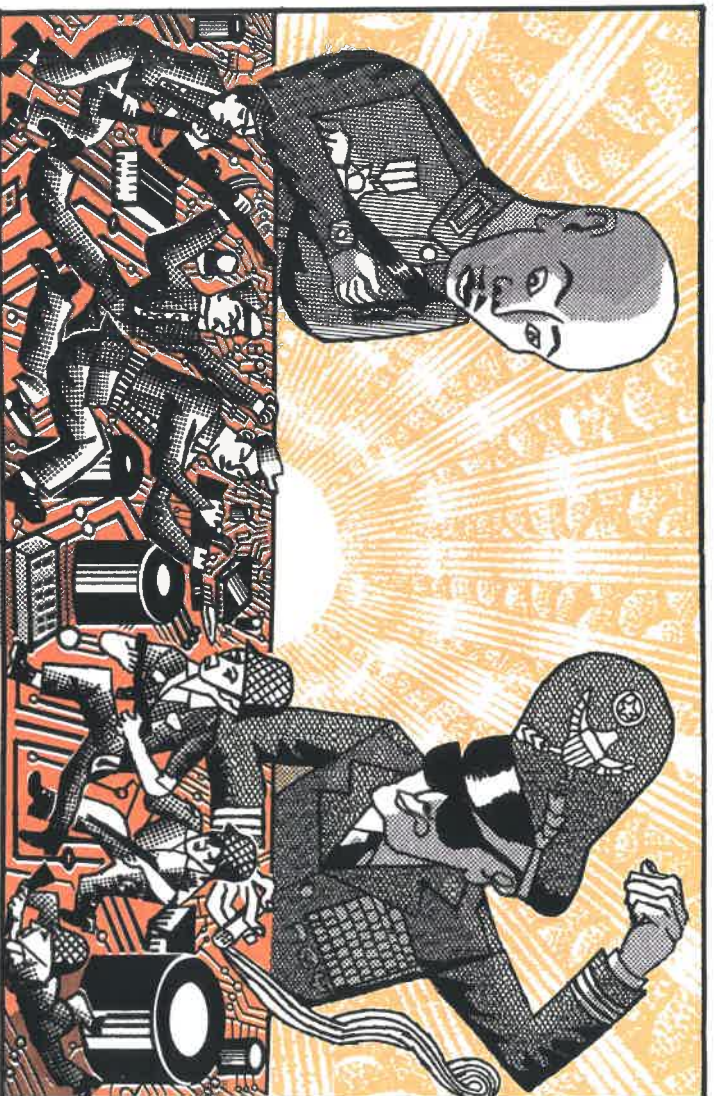
There can be only two possible results from this. One is that in the name of diversity you demotivate most of the people in your country, and therefore most of the talent. The other is that you store up resentment among majority populations who over time come to notice that they are being passed over, talked down to and treated as less than. This would be a stupid thing to do to a minority community. To do it to a majority community is madness.

We shall see how our new cabinet performs. But if it gets on top of the numerous problems that our country faces, it will be because of the skill and ability of the people involved. After all, that has to be the case doesn't it? Because if they fail, will it be down to the 'diversity'? As they say, to ask the question is to answer it.

Chips with everything

Semiconductors are the latest battleground for China and the US

FRANCIS PIKE



There is a joke in Taipei that if China invades Taiwan, the best place to shelter will be in microchip factories, because they are the only places the People's Liberation Army can't afford to destroy. The country that controls advanced chips controls the future of technology – and Taiwan's chip fabrication foundries ('fabs') are the finest in the world. Successful reunification between the mainland and its renegade province would give China a virtual monopoly over the most advanced fabs. Given Xi Jinping's designs on Taiwan, it is no wonder that the US government is worried.

For this reason, in recent months the United States has taken various steps to thwart China's attempts to make advanced semiconductors. New fabs are technically challenging to build, and eye-wateringly costly. A recent study by Boston Consulting found the cost of a large chip plant is now more than a next-generation aircraft carrier or a new nuclear power station. In Taiwan, Fab 18, which was built for the production of advanced chips, cost US\$17.5 billion.

The US attack on China's bid to dominate

future technology is twofold. The first part of the strategy is to rebuild America's share of the global chip fab business, which has fallen from a peak of 37 per cent in 1990 to just 12 per cent now. Last month, Joe Biden signed an Innovation and Competition Act with an extraordinary \$52 billion to finance technological research and the fabrication of chips in the US. The EU is making similar noises, but America has made it a national priority.

With bipartisan support, Biden specifically aims to punish US companies that invest in China

It's an attempt by Biden, supported by the Republican party, to reverse the hollowing out of US manufacturing – and is a policy that was first identified and pursued by President Trump. With bipartisan support, the new Act specifically aims to punish US companies that invest in China especially in areas where there is a struggle for supremacy, such as chipmaking.

Xi, clearly alarmed, has urged China to

increase its technological self-reliance and to 'accelerate the pace of legislation in the fields of digital economy, internet finance, artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing etc'. America's aim to disrupt China's technological advance is being strongly supported by a private sector in the West that has become increasingly aware of the geopolitical risks of having such a high percentage of its global fab capacity based in Taiwan.

Intel has, in recent years, eased away from the semiconductor industry that it once dominated, but it is now in all-out catch-up mode. In January, the company poached Apple's director of Mac system architecture and announced plans to produce system chips to compete with Apple's top-of-the-line M1 series. Intel aims to regain its position as the world's leading integrated design and fab company within three years.

But Intel's battle is not just with Apple. It needs to take on the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, which has a 50 per cent global share in advanced chips and, even more importantly, a 92 per cent share in the most advanced five-nanometre

chips. Under its new CEO Pat Gelsinger, Intel wants to become a leading contract chip maker and regain the upper hand.

As well as completing the building of a fab in Oregon, Intel is planning new fabs in Arizona and Ohio. Some \$80 billion is also earmarked for Europe, with sites in Ireland, Germany and Italy being negotiated. It is a vast project, with mind-boggling sums involved. Some analysts doubt Intel's ability to pull it off.

But while the first part of the US scheme is to match or exceed China's state-funded model for hi-tech industries, the second part is more nefarious. China is desperate to join the ranks of the advanced chip manufacturers (which include Samsung in Korea). America's plan is to prevent China from importing the machinery that enables the manufacture of advanced chips.

Key technologies for semiconductor manufacture include ultra-clean rooms, deposition, coating, etching, ionisation and packaging. But the ultimate determinant of advances is lithography – the fine printing of electronic circuits on silicon wafers. The most advanced chips are currently printed at a gauge of just five nanometres: that is, five billionths of a metre. (By way of com-

Xi Jinping, clearly alarmed, has urged China to increase its technological self-reliance

parison, the average human hair is 70,000 nanometres wide.)

At present there is only one company in the world that can make lithography machines to print wafers at the five-nanometres gauge. Based in a nondescript suburb of Eindhoven in the Netherlands, Advanced Semiconductor Materials Lithography (ASML) is perhaps the world's least well-known hi-tech business. Yet it ranks just behind Shell as the fourth largest company in Europe.

Its highest-tech machines use a process called 'extreme ultraviolet' lithography, which makes them the only systems that can do lithography below 13.5 nanometres. The company produces approximately 50 machines a year, at \$150 million a pop plus service contract. As a result, it owns that rare commodity – a market monopoly.

Last month, the US successfully put pressure on the Dutch government to block the export of such machines to China. And for good measure, America is now applying pressure on the Dutch not to export even the previous generation of machines to China.

Back home, Biden has also banned Nvidia – America's global leader in graphic processor chips – from selling its latest high-end products to Chinese customers, who made up a large part of its customer base. This is quite a setback for Beijing's ambitions in artificial intelligence: there are only

a small number of companies whose processors are optimised to run the complex algorithms needed for AI. Some of the biggest customers of Nvidia's A100 graphics processing units were the Chinese giants Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu, all providers of cloud computing services which can also be used to program AI applications.

Will Biden succeed in this attempt to throttle China's technological ambitions? At the moment there is no indication that any other country has the knowhow to duplicate ASML's extreme ultraviolet machines. Not only do they require design expertise, but their manufacture comprises a complex web of hi-tech subcontractors worldwide; replicating that would be remarkably difficult. But perhaps the main barrier for competitors is the billions of lines of software code which seem to double every four years.

However, the 60-year experience of the industry is that there are generational leaps in chip-manufacturing technology. By 2025 Intel is planning to enter what it has labelled the 'angstrom era' of the sub-nanometre chip. At this level, the etching process will need to be reduced to the width of single atoms. (An angstrom is one ten-billionth of a metre.) Intel has already placed a \$300 million order for ASML's next-generation machine.

As long as the Dutch play ball – and there is no reason to suppose they won't – the US is likely to defeat China in the chip war, at least in the short term. But there are caveats. For one thing, China has a window of opportunity to invade Taiwan and take control of its chip factories before the bulk of new ones are transferred to America and Europe.

Secondly, China will keep trying to develop technologies of its own. It has already announced the development of a seven-nanometre chip using the last generation of lithography machines combined with various technological tricks, although experts doubt whether these chips could be harvested at an economic level of yield.

America's Semiconductor Industry Association has concluded that, for the time being, 'more advanced technology is still out of [China's] reach'. Nevertheless, China has demonstrable world-class scientific ability. Candidates to replace ASML's extreme ultraviolet techniques include the use of X-rays, electron beams, ion beams and nanoimprint lithography. China could get there first.

The possible unintended consequences of the chip war, and other technological wars, should be noted. If globalisation has brought enormous economic benefits to the world since Deng Xiaoping's deregulation of the Chinese economy in the 1980s, deglobalisation, the retrenchment to national interest and autarky, is likely to bring the world slower growth, or worse. Both America and China will be losers in their chip war even if the end result is not a real global war.

BAROMETER

In they come, out they go

Liz Truss is the 15th prime minister to have served under Queen Elizabeth II, and her appointment was the 15th time the Queen has overseen a change of prime minister during her reign (Winston Churchill was already PM when she became Queen but Harold Wilson served twice). It would require political turmoil, however, for Elizabeth II to catch up with Queen Victoria on the latter score. While only ten different prime ministers served under Victoria, she oversaw 19 changes of prime minister. On five occasions the PM she appointed lasted less than a year. William Gladstone was appointed for his third spell on 1 February 1866, but six months later, on 20 July, he had to visit the Queen in order to resign.

Speaking terms

What can Boris Johnson earn as an ex-PM on the speaker circuit? Some payments that Theresa May has received:

- £160,370** from JP Morgan for two speeches.
- £127,200** for one speaking engagement from the Distinguished Speaker Series of Vero Beach, Florida.
- £404,800** for six engagements with the Cambridge Speaker Series of Ross, California.
- £109,000** for a speech to the Danish Bar and Law Society.

Habit-forming

How have the drinking and drug-taking habits of 11- to 15-year-olds changed since before the pandemic?

- 6%** say they drink once a week or more, the same as in 2018. **40%** say they have ever had an alcoholic drink, rising from **13%** for 11-year-olds to **65%** for 15-year-olds.
- 1%** say they are regular smokers, down from **2%** in 2018. **12%** say they have ever smoked, down from **16%** in 2018.
- 9%** are vapers, up from **6%** in 2018.
- 12%** say they have taken illegal drugs in the past year, down from **17%** in 2018. **18%** say they have ever taken illegal drugs (down from **24%** in 2018).

Source: NHS Digital

The big freeze

Proposals to freeze energy bills could cost the taxpayer up to **£130bn**. How does that compare with estimated public spending in other areas in the current financial year?

- Healthcare..... **£210.9bn**
- Pensions..... **£178.5bn**
- Welfare..... **£142.0bn**
- Education..... **£104.9bn**
- Defence..... **£60.2bn**
- Transport..... **£46.9bn**
- Servicing government debt..... **£88.0bn**

Source: wkapublicspending.co.uk

Flat broke

Help to Buy has been a disaster for me

EMMA HOLLENDER

Do you want a cup of tea? The surveyor shook his head. It would take me longer to boil the kettle than for him to do a valuation of my 400 sq ft, one-bedroom flat. I paced awkwardly around. A minute later, he gave me the thumbs-up. Valuation complete, he left. I boiled the kettle anyway.

Four years after the purchase of the flat, via the 'Help to Buy: Equity Loan' scheme, I couldn't be more desperate to sell. Would I make a profit? I just want to escape its clutches and avoid a loss. Why sell? Let's start at the beginning. Why buy?

Perhaps it was an early midlife crisis. At nearly 30 years old, I thought it time to leave the familial roost. It was unfair on my parents to have me, the resident ghost daughter, living at home for ever. I was single and had spent years flip-flopping between living at home and renting with friends. Now, my friends were either married, living abroad or on such high salaries that I could no longer afford to rent with them.

The timing was right but only one conundrum remained. Money. As a teacher, I hardly earned big bucks. My bank's mortgage limit at the time was my annual salary multiplied by 4.5. My maximum mortgage allowance was £170,000. In London, this opened few doors. A property search engine delivered fruitless findings: long boats, parking spaces or retirement homes. Shared ownership was out of the question because my salary was too low.

Then Help to Buy came along. Looking back, I wish I'd never heard those three words. Like many bad ideas, it sounded good at the time. It provided a tailor-made, first-time buyers' solution, designed for poor millennials like me. The guidance on Gov.uk was inspiring: 'Help to Buy equity loans provide a low-interest loan towards your deposit. Customers need a 5 per cent deposit, and the government lends up to 20 per cent of the value of the home (up to 40 per cent of the value if you are purchasing in London).'

What did this mean for me? No longer restricted to a budget of £170,000, I could buy a new-build property valued up to £350,000. On the spreadsheet, the numbers made sense. A 40 per cent government loan (£140,000), the mortgage (£170,000) and my life's savings (£40,000) totalled £350,000. And the best thing of all? I could buy the

property by myself, with no family donations required. For once I felt like a grown-up.

In August 2018, I moved to my new home turf: a one-bed flat in Zone 5, north London. I squirmed at parting with my hard-earned cash. 'Are you sure?' my parents asked, more than once. 'It's a big decision.' Of course I was sure. Property was an investment.

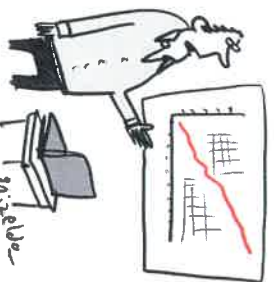
After stamp duty, solicitor fees and furniture costs, I was down to my last penny. A few weeks later, I realised I'd never stopped to think about the location, or if I'd be happy to call this place home. 'It'll be a dream to clean,' said a friend, smiling encouragingly. 'It's so tiny.' The flat, although shiny, with top-of-the-range specifications, was soulless. It didn't feel like a home.

This year, reality hit. I have recently changed career to be a civil servant. My sal-

The numbers in my spreadsheet have turned red. My monthly outgoings could rocket to unknown heights

ary has taken a nosedive. I'm approaching middle age, with decreased earnings, and learning the hard way about rising interest rates. I have to sell my flat. Financially and emotionally, it is the only way out.

Four years ago, five years seemed a long time. Not any more. Next August, the term on my fixed-rate mortgage ends. Furthermore, monthly interest payments on the 40 per cent equity loan will kick in – it is interest-free only for the first five years. I admit I turned a blind eye to this guidance on Gov.uk when I bought my flat. 'In the sixth year, you'll be charged interest at a rate of 1.75 per cent. This will be applied to the equity loan amount you originally borrowed.'



'Whatever goes up, must go up again.'

And there's more good news: 'The interest rate increases every year in April, by adding the Consumer Price Index plus 2 per cent.' In other words, from year six onwards, I am doomed. The numbers in my spreadsheet have turned red. My monthly outgoings could rocket to unknown heights. It is a gamble I can't win.

I'm not alone. In the year that I bought, some 46,000 people took out mortgages under the Help to Buy loan scheme. They'll be hit by increased interest rates next year. Another 52,000 people will reach the end of their interest-free and fixed terms in 2024. Who knows what inflation will be by then?

What now? The property has been on the market for nine weeks with no offers yet. My estate agents remain hopeful. In my view, however, my little flat is lost in an overcrowded market of new developments. It's a clone of thousands of other flats just like it. What's more, the flat has depreciated. I bought at £340,000, and will be lucky to sell for £300,000. Help to Buy does at least have one saving grace, which is protection against negative equity. The payback of the equity loan is valued at 40 per cent of the final selling price. So if, for example, I sell at £300,000, then I only pay back £120,000, rather than the original equity loan value.

The repayment of the Equity Loan (£120,000), my mortgage (of which £160,000 remains) and the early mortgage repayment fee (£4,000) will cost me £284,000. If I sell the flat at £300,000, after this deduction, I am £16,000 in the black. So far, so good – or is it? Four years prior, I contributed my life's savings (£40,000). That £40,000 has turned into £16,000. I have made a net loss.

On Gov.uk, the scheme is painted as a success story: 'The Help to Buy equity loan scheme has helped more than a quarter of a million people to buy a home.' The scheme closes to new applications in October. In my view not a moment too soon.

'You've learnt a lot from the experience,' sympathise my parents. But it has been an expensive lesson that I could ill afford to learn. Pride comes before a fall – which in my case, will be a spectacular fall off the property ladder.

Emma Hollender is a civil servant and former science teacher.

MARY WAKEFIELD

Kill badgers to save hedgehogs



Until last month I hadn't seen a hedgehog for close to 30 years, though they were part of everyday life when I was a child. In the school holidays, we'd rush first thing to the nearby cattle grids to check for animals who'd fallen in overnight. It's what passed for fun back then: picking damp critters out of concrete prisons.

Sometimes there were lambs, wedged in up to their woolly armpits; sometimes there were angry, pulsing toads. But it was hedgehog rescue that was our sacred duty. We'd pick them up in towels and take them to the hedgehog spa in the boiler room, where they'd spend the day lounging about eating chopped eggs. Never feed a hedgehog milk. It gives them horrible diarrhoea.

That was the mid-1980s, and it was then that the hedgehog population began its steepest decline. By the mid-1990s, three quarters of what had once been an estimated population of 36 million had disappeared. In 2020, with fewer than a million left, they were declared at risk of extinction.

It was at that point that I put them in the mental box of things I choose not to think about, like bee decline and trafficked children. Roads are the biggest threat to hedgehogs and no one could or should ban cars. Nothing to be done. I resigned myself to not seeing a hedgehog again. I was wrong.

The first hog of the summer was one who fell on to the cover of my friend's swimming pool. She appeared with him held in front of her on a dustpan and we gathered for a look. Most animals billed as cute are horrifying close up, their faces a mass of eyes or proboscises. This hedgehog was a beauty. He had silvery wings of fur around the eyes and a nose like a whippet. He crunched noisily through two jam-jar lids of damp dog biscuits and fell asleep under a shed.

The next hog I found meandering around mid-road in Northumberland, so I fetched a towel and moved it to safety. Numbers three, four and five were French. On holiday near Nantes, just a few days ago, sitting outside at night, there was a noise like a coffee percolator from under the garden table. After a while, a large hedgehog ambled into sight, hoovering up insects along the ridges in the decking. He paused briefly to sniff my foot and look me up and down, then car-

ried on. Why are hedgehogs so unfazed by people? I have a theory that it's to do with gardening and the hope of worms. Robins, who also enjoy a worm, are the most sociable of birds.

But why so many hedgehogs now? Is it the drought? The thought of thirsty hedgehogs forced out of hiding has brought back my urge to do something. But what? These animals are hard to help. They're just so unsuited to the modern world. Weed killer, pesticides, slug pellets all do for them. Underneath their hovercraft skirts they have surprisingly long legs. A hog will travel for miles a night in search of food, crossing roads on which they're eventually inevitably squashed. Curling up is a terrible defensive

Badgers have friends in high places, including the erstwhile prime minister's cuddly wife

strategy for the 21st century. Robot mowers slash at them as they lie balled-up in the grass. Modern suburban man's dream present is a hedgehog nightmare.

The only thing I can think to do for them is to risk the wrath of eco-fanatics and lend tentative support to badger culling. Badgers are a hedgehog's sole predator in the UK wild. They're mustelids, cousins of the snewy, brutal wolverine, with the same long, curved claws. A badger will insert these claws between the spiny coat and the soft belly of a balled-up hog and scoop out its insides the way you might an avocado. I've come across the empty shell of a hedgehog before in badger country. It's horrifying.

Badgers are intraguild predators, meaning they both eat hedgehogs and compete

with them for food. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that the selective badger cull, introduced to help stop bovine TB, has been helpful for hedgehogs. There are decent studies suggesting that where there was suitable habitat, the hedgehog population more than doubled over five years when badger numbers were controlled. Other studies show hedgehogs don't forage nearly as widely in areas where there are badgers. One study mentions a 'landscape of fear'. Poor sods. Just imagine having the Freddy Krueger of the animal world on your tail.

But badgers have friends in high places, including the erstwhile PM's cuddly wife and her good friend Dominic Dyer, former chairman of the Badger Trust. Any suggestion that badgers might affect the hedgehog population and they create a landscape of fear of their own. Boris's nickname for Carrie, it's said, is 'Little Otter'. Is this a show of mustelid solidarity? More likely it's just the usual, exhausting animal proxy war. Green activists these days loathe farmers, not only because of pesticides or bad practice, but because of the very idea that the land should be owned or used to raise animals to eat. Most farmers see badgers as the enemy – they churn up land, maul lambs and (perhaps) spread TB – so of course badgers are a cause célèbre for animal welfare groups.

Though the licence for animal welfare ends this year, campaigners insist that's long overdue. They use special badger maths to make their case. 'We can't let half the UK badger population be eradicated,' says the website of the Wildlife and Countryside Link. 'The total number of badgers culled since the legal shooting began in 2013 is already around 140,000... So by the time the cull is finished over 50 per cent of the badger population may well have been killed.' No it won't. The population is stable even with the cull. During my cattle grid rescue years, badgers were in trouble, but they're now an animal of least concern. It's the hedgehogs that need help.

The only bright spot that I can see on the otherwise dismal political scene is that Liz Truss is a fan of hedgehogs. She wished them a happy Christmas from the Commons in 2015. It didn't do much to revive their numbers, but it's still somehow cheering.



'We need dogs at polling stations now!'

Bodies beneath us

The rumoured tradition of human sacrifice in Bolivia

THOMAS GRAHAM

La Paz
One summer a few years ago, I joined a group of miners in Potosí, Bolivia, to toast the Andean Mother Earth. I had just moved to La Paz, the country's political capital, to try my hand as a journalist. As we chatted, a cup of warm beer and shots of spirits were handed around the circle. Before drinking, we had to pour a little on the earth and a little on the head of the white llama that was trussed up between us. My notebook from that day is speckled with brownish stains. After we'd finished passing around the spirits, the llama was held down and its throat was cut.

'The most important part of the llama is the blood,' one miner said. 'Blood is life, and the gods don't bleed. If we don't give them blood, they will take miners' blood instead.' He looked at me with a slightly menacing smile. 'But there is one thing better than llama blood – gringo blood.' They all cackled, and the drinks continued round.

I didn't think too much of his joke at the time. Bolivian miners take some pleasure in shocking foreigners, whether by swigging near-pure alcohol, playing with dynamic or joking about human sacrifice. But the moment came back to me last month when a young man appeared on the news – slurring, bloodied and covered in dirt – claiming he had just punched his way out of a coffin buried under a Bolivian building site. He said he'd been used as a *sullu*: a sacrifice for the Pachamama or Mother Earth.

A *sullu* traditionally refers to a dried llama foetus. It may, for example, be buried under a building to appease the Pachamama and ward off accidents. The use of *sullu* is an ancient practice and remains commonplace. In La Paz, there's a witches' market that sells them next to trinkets for tourists. Up in El Alto, the neighbouring city which is almost entirely Aymara and Quechua, Bolivia's two largest indigenous groups, there are rows of cabins where ritualists sell *sullu* alongside coca leaves, sugar figurines, cigarettes and alcohol. Offerings are put together and burnt over braziers beneath three peaks of Illimani, La Paz's sacred mountain.

The practices of a *sullu* offering depend on where you are in Bolivia. The many thousands of small-scale miners in the highlands like to go a little further than the city dwellers. The stakes for them are high: they spend their days crawling through hand-hacked tunnels, inhaling the particles that will one day likely kill them, hoping to find a good vein of tin or silver. They make daily offerings to El Tío, the Uncle, a mercurial, devilish figure who lives beneath the earth. It's not uncommon for Catholic Bolivians to leave this god of the underworld cigarettes

Homeless people worry about where to sleep, for fear of being spirited off to a midnight sacrifice

or spirits, despite strong condemnation from the church.

For the traditional festival to the earth gods, they splash out on a white llama. When its throat is slit, the blood is collected in bowls and fed to the earth, painted on cheeks and spattered over the mouth of the mine. Then the animal is butchered, its innards buried and the meat barbecued for lunch. The bones, burnt to ashes, go to El Tío.

The more one offers, the more one receives. And though historians and spiritual leaders say it would be a perversion of ancestral rites, there have long been rumours of human sacrifice. The story told by the blood-

ied man fits the urban myth, which says that drunks are plied with alcohol before being buried alive. The myth was popularised in the 2008 film *Elephant Cemetery*. The title refers to establishments where alcoholics can pay to drink themselves to death. In the film, the protagonist spends his last weeks of life drinking in one of these bars and stewing in memories, thinking back to a time when he sold a drunk friend to some builders to be buried as a *sullu*.

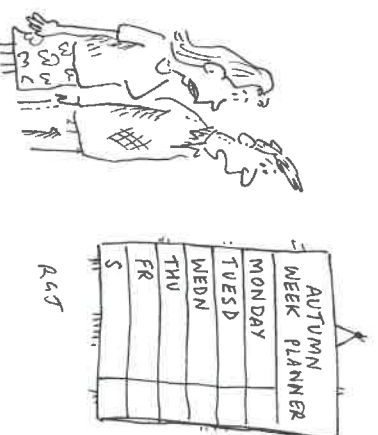
Such a bargain might not even be necessary. Walk through La Paz early on a Sunday morning and you'll see people passed out on the pavement. Look up and you'll see skyscrapers going up around the city.

The recent report isn't the first to make it to the media. From time to time, someone will show up claiming a miraculous escape; others disappear and bodies are found in suspicious circumstances. Homeless people in Bolivia worry about where to sleep, for fear of being spirited off to a midnight sacrifice.

Rarely are any of the cases formally reported or pursued. This latest one won't be either. The man's mother has said that her son, while traumatised, would not be taking the matter any further, because they lack the money to bribe police and prosecutors into action. Some have cast doubt on the details of his story. The police say they would prosecute him if he turns out to be lying.

But people seized the chance to revive the *sullu* story. In pulpy news reports, bemused construction workers were asked whether they'd ever seen someone buried alive. Presenters on chat shows frowned and shook their heads, lamenting the turn from tradition to crime.

Online, it became the joke of the week. Black humour is pervasive in the country. Last week, I was invited to a *sullu*-themed event at a nightclub. (The flyer, tastefully, depicted a llama foetus rather than a human sacrifice.) I didn't go, but I did go to a karaoke bar. When the birthday girl had had so much to drink that she ended up on the floor, everyone looked at each other and said 'Ya está lista' – she's ready. We all cackled, and the drinks continued round.



'The days are getting shorter.'

LETTERS

Why we allowed it

Sir: In her article 'Why didn't more people resist lockdown?' (3 September), Lionel Shriver partially answers her own question. Priti Patel told us it was our public duty to shop our neighbours if they had three friends to tea, and our previously invisible police force started to patrol parks and beaches with unprecedented vigour, with a threat of £1,000 fines for malfeasance. There was no eagerness, but the public were glued to the nightly broadcasts from No. 10, where the PM told us we would be little better than murderers if we didn't obey the dictans.

The fear all this created is still evident as I walk round Sainsbury's every week and see masked shoppers disinfecting their trollies as if their life depended on it.

Martin Henry

Good Easter, Essex

Violating our freedom

Sir: Lee Cain defends the dictatorship of which he was part (as No. 10's director of communications) by asking us if we believe that without lockdown, 'people would have voluntarily stayed at home and avoided social contacts, as in Sweden, so restrictions were not needed'? (Letters, 3 September). Yes, we do. And it says something about what is wrong with Britain that this violation of our freedom is defended by a 'director of communications', not by a minister.

Michael Upton

Edinburgh

Worst-case scenarios

Sir: In his Diary (3 September), Michael Grove eulogises about the importance of 'worst-case scenarios' being brought to the prime minister. Isn't it the case though that 'worst-case scenarios' are what led the UK government to make two of its most serious policy mistakes? Namely, enforcing repeated lockdowns and signing up to the Northern Ireland Protocol. As such, any PM faced with a policy recommendation based on a 'worst-case scenario' would be well advised to do precisely the opposite.

Adam Kelly

Leeds, West Yorkshire

Brum transformed

Sir: Contrary to Stuart Jeffries's view (Books, 27 August), Birmingham civic leaders were well aware in the 1970s that their city was too dependent on car manufacturing and were determined to do something about it. Indeed they'd been warned on a trip to their twin city Frankfurt that manufacturing jobs would sink to

only 20 per cent of the total and that the future lay in service industries. Their first effort was the National Exhibition Centre, built in Solihull with Birmingham money and opened by the Queen in 1976. It was an immediate success. However, a survey soon revealed that businesspeople who visited via the fine new station were going home the same day and spending no money in Brum itself. We were told there wasn't enough for well-heeled visitors to do in the city. One suggestion was to upgrade the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under a new conductor, 25-year-old Simon Ratle, but he'd only come if we promised the CBSO a whopping £1 million a year. I voted for that. He also wanted a new concert hall: construction started in 1984, and it was opened as part of the International Convention Centre in 1991.

My old ward of Northfield (once home to thousands of car workers) has one of the lowest claimant counts in the region. The recent Commonwealth Games showed how the city has been transformed. Anyone who doubts it should go and see for themselves.

Edwina Currie Jones

Birmingham City Councillor 1975-1986
High Peak, Derbyshire

Franco-British hostility

Sir: Simon Kuper indicated ('What Macron wants', 3 September) that the only Franco-British hostilities after 1815 were at Mers el Kebir in July 1940, when a British fleet incapacitated a French one (which had refused either to join them or to assume neutrality). There was a good deal more than that. In September 1940 the submarine *Béziers* torpedoed HMS *Resolution* off Dakar. In June 1941 Vichy French forces inflicted several thousand casualties on Allied troops in Syria. They also bombed Gibraltar, and the British captured Vichy French-controlled Madagascar, which the Japanese had been using to facilitate submarine activity in the Indian Ocean. France has long exhibited considerable ambivalence about England. Napoleon chose exile in Chislehurst, De Gaulle could not tolerate the idea of us in the Common Market, Macron hates us leaving it.

Charles Harris

Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

Pile of work

Sir: Alan Rodger's letter (3 September) about the treatment of haemorrhoids with hot irons reminded me of my summer job in 1973 as a theatre orderly in Bangor General Hospital. I had the pleasure of 'prepping' several bottoms for the procedure using a brass razor. I also recall a young registrar, who later became a CBE and chairman of Papworth Hospital, claiming and proving that he could do a vasectomy in four minutes; and my colleagues putting drops of anaesthetic into bread and feeding it to the seagulls, with fatal consequences in mid-air.

Allan Suherland

Stonehaven

Living with Moxley

Sir: In 2010 I became the keeper of a six-month-old pure-bred Bengal called Moxley (Notes on Bengal cats, 3 September). I was his third keeper (no one 'owns' Bengals); the previous two had given up within weeks. We spent eight years together, and the best way to describe him is that he was like Damian in the original *Omen* film – he appeared sweet but was a demon. If he wanted to get my attention, he would simply smash something. Sadly he died of a heart attack three years ago, and I have a lovely normal tabby instead. My house is much calmer, but it's just not the same.

Chris Warr

Halesowen, West Midlands

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS | MARTIN VANDER WEYER

A cocktail of misfortunes is hammering the pound



My predecessor Christopher Fildes looked at exchange rates through a cocktail glass: three negronis for the Italian lira equivalent of a tennet, good; a \$2 martini for £1, even better. That latter ratio applied briefly 30 years ago when, he wrote, the favoured tipple 'brushed against my lips like an angel's kiss'. It recurred during the financial crisis of 2007-08, when no one was really able to enjoy it, and has never been seen since. On Monday, as Liz Truss was crowned, the pound dipped below \$1.15, in sight of its 1985 all-time low of \$1.05. 'The prospect of... parity versus the dollar,' said Bloomberg, 'is becoming ever less outlandish.'

What cocktail of misfortunes brought us to this? The first problem is that the dollar is so strong. It's already at par with the euro and has steamrollered the yen. That reflects the Federal Reserve's muscular approach to anti-inflationary rate rises, America's relatively secure energy supplies and underlying economic strengths, and the dollar's role as a reserve currency. The second problem is that the pound is so weak – because markets think that UK inflation will continue rising apace; that recession is certain; that the Bank of England is ineffectual; that public borrowing costs are set to rocket; and that we're too dependent on foreign capital to fund our deficits.

Can anything deflect the pound's fall, which is making fuel and other imports even more expensive? My man on the foreign exchanges says: 'If Kwasi Kwarteng as Truss's new Chancellor were to adopt the tougher tone of Rishi Sunak, the market would take heart' and we might see a modest rally. But I'm not betting on it as I lot up the likely cost of a long-planned trip to the US next month. I'll think myself lucky if a \$15 martini costs me less than £15.

Decisions must be taken...

A friend of mine who runs a FTSE company once worked for the late Christopher Bland, a boardroom gladiator whose chairmanships

included BT, the BBC and National Freight. Famed for intolerance of waffle, Bland gave my chum this advice for anyone in a leadership position: 'When you're presented with a decision, always take it, never vacillate. If your judgment's good, you'll be right 90 per cent of the time. If your judgment's poor, you don't deserve the top job.'

Boris Johnson – in my direct view when he was our editor – was a vacillator who took decisions only when he couldn't avoid them, and often as stabs in the dark. As for Liz Truss – to adapt her remark about President Macron – I'll judge her on deeds not words, hoping the deeds turn out more pragmatic than the ideological words. On that front, she might take a lesson from the French leader, whose approach to capping energy bills, corralling energy companies, fostering interconnections with Spain and Algeria and declaring targets for reduced power usage has set her a notably businesslike example.

...starting with this one

Kwasi Kwarteng has a forceful manner of which Bland might have approved, but left one major decision for his successor as business secretary, Jacob Rees-Mogg. Back in May, he 'called in' for national security assessment the acquisition by Nexperia – a Dutch subsidiary of a Chinese parent, Wingtech – of Newport Wafer Fab, which, though sold for just £63 million, counts as the UK's largest semiconductor maker because several bigger UK businesses in that sector (led by Arm Holdings, owned by Softbank of Japan) have already passed into foreign hands.

This is the first significant use of powers under the 2021 National Security and Investment Act, which says that a decision to block or allow a takeover should be made within a maximum of 75 days. In this case that would have been by mid-August, when Kwarteng was busy campaigning for Truss and perhaps constrained by civil servants from making a controversial ruling during the Downing Street interregnum. Now we may not hear the answer until October.

Most observers saw the NS&I Act as a too-late attempt to protect UK intellectual property that might have defence or cybersecurity applications from falling into Chinese or other unfriendly hands. Truss herself was a sabre-rattler towards China as foreign secretary – but geopolitical strategists might advise that it's healthier for China to beef up its microchip capability by acquiring small fry like Newport than by invading Taiwan in order to seize the globally important Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company.

Rees-Mogg might also be influenced by Sir Geoffrey Owen, who, in a recent paper for Policy Exchange, concluded that 'the government should be wary of trying to steer the [semiconductor] industry in a particular direction. Decisions on which development avenues are the most promising are best left to the private sector'.

Ideology is easy to spout, we might add, but governing is complicated.

Back to the 1950s

No politician or columnist has a real solution for the energy price spike. We might agree, with varying levels of reluctance, that borrowed public money must be deployed to cushion households and businesses from the worst of its impacts. I think we'd also agree – though it's hardly a consoling thought for advocates of *laissez-faire* – that only market forces can actually end the crisis, by bringing global supply, demand and expectations back into balance. Ministers nevertheless must maintain the fiction that all problems can be solved by decisive political intervention, whereas columnists can resort to restaurant tips instead.

So allow me to mention Lastingham Grange on the North York Moors, where an idyllic lunch on the rose-garden terrace last week came in at my target price of £30 a head. So comfortably old-fashioned that it might be a setting for Miss Marple, the hotel is a time capsule from the 1950s – the perfect place to recapture that decade's frugal and resilient spirit, so needed today.

BOOKS & ARTS

Mark Cocker celebrates the courage and extraordinary high-altitude resilience of the Sherpas

David Profumo is appalled by Britain's betrayal of the Chagos Islands

Paul Levy traces the history of Italy through four courses in a Roman restaurant

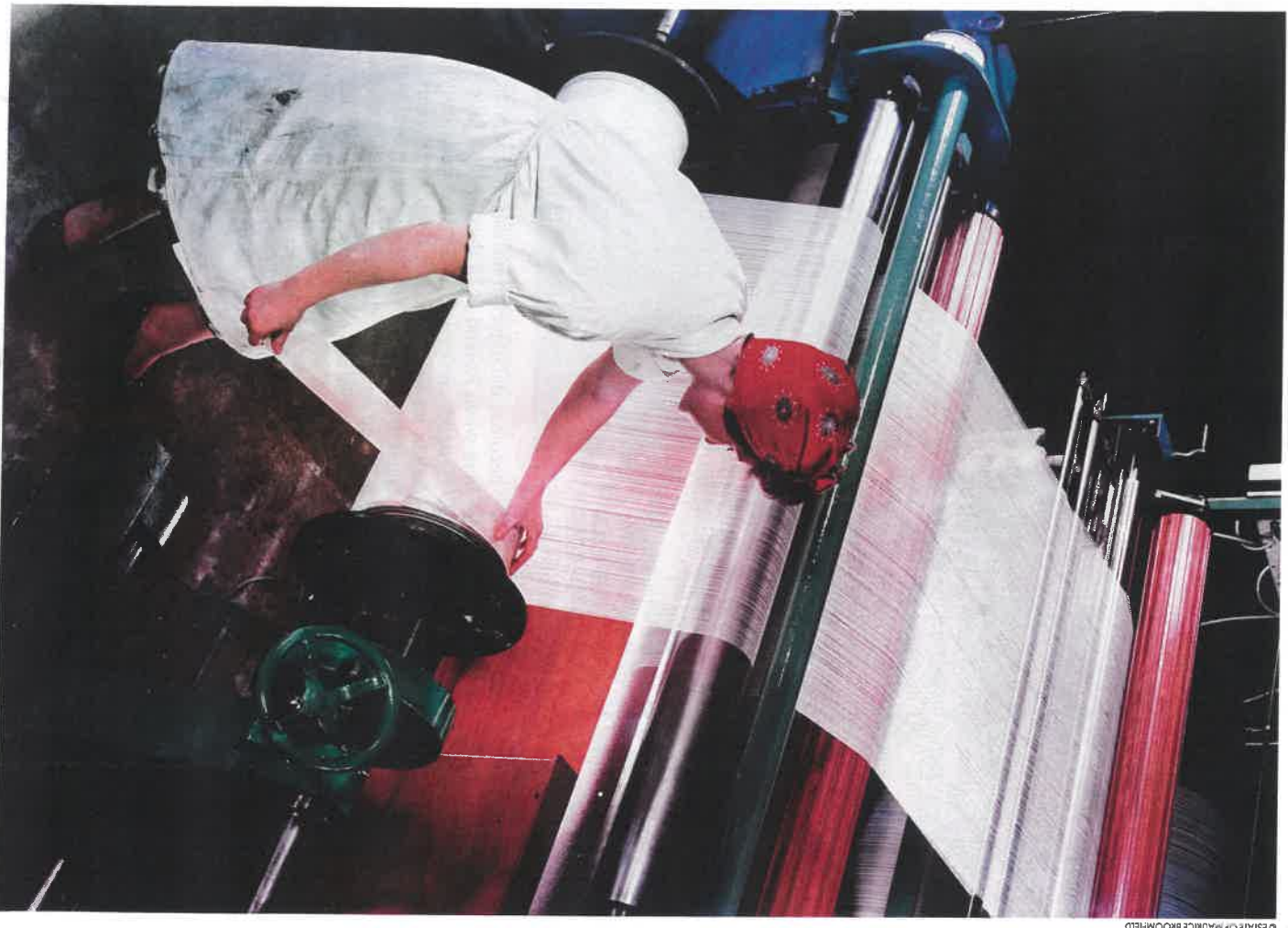
Alexander Chula wonders whether a murderous lunatic ought to adorn the Fourth Plinth

Michael Hann enters the jolly world of hyperpop, nightcore and chiptune

James Walton struggles through the latest Lord of the Rings spectacular

Rupert Christiansen admits he was never a Nureyev fan

'Preparing a Warp from Nylon Yarn', 1964, by Maurice Broomfield, taken at British Nylon Spinners, Pontypool, Wales
Sam Kriss – p45



© ESTATE OF MAURICE BROOMFIELD



View of Ama Dablam, one of the most beautiful mountains in the Everest region, sometimes called the 'Matterhorn of the Himalayas'

Into thin air Mark Cocker

Himalaya: Exploring the Roof of the World

by John Keay
Bloomsbury Circus, £30, pp. 432

Sherpa: Stories of Life and Death from the Forgotten Guardians of Everest

by Pradeep Basnyal and Ankit Babu Adhikari
Cassell, £20, pp. 304

John Keay has for many years been a key historian and prolific contributor to the romance attaching to the highest mountains on Earth. His latest book is described as a summation of that lifetime's contribution, offering an overview of the Himalāya – the Sanskrit version ('Abode of Snow') that Keay bids us use – both as a physical place and as a realm of intellectual inquiry.

The book opens with a bang. Its first theme is the astonishing mountain-making forces that created the region. Specific-

ly, Keay gives us the prolonged intellectual skirmishes among geologists as they tried to piece together the formative processes. The one who unpicked their genesis was the German scholar Alfred Wegener, who vanished without trace in Greenland while seeking proof for his ideas on continental drift. It would be more than half a century before an understanding of plate tectonics finally brought confirmation of his world-changing theory.

Essentially what Wegener summoned was a vision of India as a land mass, sailing at the speed fingernails grow through the Tethys Sea of the Cretaceous period. By the middle of the Eocene, roughly 40 million years ago, there was an unimaginable cataclysm as the subcontinent, docking with Eurasia, smashed and buckled the Earth's crust from Afghanistan to Myanmar.

For thousands of years, people had pondered the anomaly that a region rising to eight kilometres above sea level contained ubiquitous evidence of marine life. Ancient Hindus had long incorporated fossil ammonites in their religious symbolism and Buddhist women in Ladakh adorned their wedding finery with cowrie shells. Even at Everest's sum-

mit, climbers are confronted with limestone formations fashioned in an ancient seabed.

The opening account of all this is a *tour de force* of concise exposition. But what becomes increasingly apparent is that Keay's personal bias is not only for what he calls 'the human component in Himalayan studies' but for those parts of it that are largely white, military-trained and male. One woman, however, does make a striking appearance: Alexandra David-Neel, the redoubtable French scholar of Mahayana Buddhism who visited Lhasa in 1924.

It was a puzzle why a region rising so high above sea level should contain ubiquitous signs of marine life

Most of the book's stories of exploration date from the colonial period. A discussion of Himalayan botany, for example, begins with the wonderfully eccentric Colonel Frederick Bailey. His glorious exploits, including his discovery of the celebrated Himalayan blue poppy beloved of English gardeners, all date from the Edwardian period. Keay's account of natural history more or less ends with the

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LONDON'S RARE BOOK FAIR

adventures of Frank Kingdon-Ward, another prolific English author of books about plant-hunting in the region, but whose work was done by the 1950s.

I wanted something on the more prosaic but systematic map-makers of the area's botany, such as Oleg Polunin and Adam Stainton, whose *Forests of Nepal* and *Flowers of the Himalaya* are still available in Kathmandu's bookshops. Equally, where are the 50 years of research on forestry and ornithology by Carol and Tim Inskip, and by the Nepali conservation biologist Hem Sagar Baral?

More puzzling is the lack of any reflection on what one might call the western scholarly muddle over environmental catastrophe – landslides, soil erosion, forest clearance and biological loss – which led to prophecies in the 1970s of wholesale degradation. In fact the crisis never materialised, partly because of changes in indigenous lifestyles, especially male emigration, and partly through community forest programmes. Against all expectation, tree cover had increased from 29 to 45 per cent in Nepal's middle elevations by 2016.

Keay's account of the mountaineering challenges also focuses on the pre-second world war period, and especially on the Everest expeditions of the 1920s and 1930s. One fascinating aspect is how European nations vied for control of particular peaks. The Italians asserted a sort of colonial supremacy at K2; the Germans did much the same at Nanga Parbat and later, with a hiatus in British expeditions after the deaths of George Mallory and Sandy Irvine, at Everest itself. Despite these efforts, none of the parties was successful in their own nature-conquering terms. Not a single 8,000m peak had been climbed by 1939.

For an account of more recent Himalayan mountaineering, there's *Sherpa*, by Pardeep Bashyal and Ankit Babu Adhikari. In the reputational rise of a small Nepali community the authors have found a subject full of astonishing derring-do and physical courage. Sherpas may once have been the dog-bodies in other people's adventures but today they are the heroes – and, increasingly, heroines – of their own story, and their climbing abilities have made them the most famous of the Himalayan communities. Yet the Sherpa population, centred on the high valleys around Everest, numbers just 150,000 – about the same as Dundee.

One story illustrating formidable high-altitude resilience involves the climbing prodigy Mingma David. In 2013 he was dropped by rope from a helicopter at 7,000m on the upper slopes of a Himalayan peak. His mission was to rescue a Spanish climber and his Sherpa companion who had been lost for days in a white-out. Searching alone through hours of darkness, Mingma David eventually found the pair, although the Spaniard had died. But he did save the life of his

countryman, who recovered after just two days in hospital.

In the early days of mountaineering, Sherpas had been just one of a number of ethnic groups supplying muscle and local know-how to western climbers. None was ever treated as an equal until the 1953 British Everest expedition – and especially the moment, captured by Edmund Hillary and transmitted to the world's media, of Tenzing Norgay standing on the peak with flag held triumphantly aloft.

Tenzing was the first indigenous mountaineering superstar, courted by India's prime minister Nehru and made wealthy by fame and opportunity. Yet even his lifestyle now looks modest. A second generation includes Lakpa Rita, the first Sherpa to climb 'the seven summits', the highest peaks in all the continents. In turn, his Everest tally of 17 summits has been eclipsed by contemporaries, one of whom, Kami Rita Sherpa, made a record-breaking 26th ascent this spring.

Alongside this reputational transformation has come a revolution in Sherpa economics. Tenzing ran his own mountain operation out of the Indian hill station Darjeeling, but the ordinary porter then earned less than 50 US cents a week. Today, porters (who are often women) receive \$3–4,000 an expedition. Tourism is an important factor in the Nepali economy and Everest expeditions bring in millions to Sherpa communities. Real estate values in their largest town, Namche Bazaar, exceed those of Kathmandu, yet many guides own lodges and restaurants, offering yak steak, champagne and views of Everest.

There is a less seemly side to the changes, and not just the eight tonnes of human excrement dumped annually at Base Camp. The 600 people who climb Everest every season often have to queue beneath the summit, with dwindling oxygen, barely able to go forward or back and at the mercy of conditions. No wonder it's called the 'death zone'.

One is tempted to ask: what on Earth motivates them?

I may have some insight. I vividly recall trekking in Nepal (in cheap Chinese plimssols) through the upper reaches of the deepest valley on Earth, the Kali Gandaki, near a cliff-top settlement called Kag Beni. It alone conjured scenes from James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon*. Escaping the oxygen deprivation of higher altitude, I was overcome by a sense of exaltation I have seldom, if ever, experienced since. The authors of these books know that feeling – of the Himalaya being the abode of the gods. Keay quotes Sir Francis Younghusband's memories of riding out from Lhasa early last century: 'I was beside myself with an intensity of joy and a revelation of the essential goodness of the world. I was convinced past all refutation that men at heart are divine.'

The indispensable impresario Bryan Karetnyk

Diaghilev's Empire: How the Ballets Russes Enthralled the World

by Rupert Christiansen

Faber, £25, pp. 384

'What exactly is it you do?' asked a bamboozled King Alfonso XIII of Spain upon meeting Sergei Diaghilev at a reception in Madrid, while the Great War raged on in Europe. 'Your Majesty, I am like you,' came the impresario's quick-witted reply. 'I don't work, I do nothing. But I am indispensable.' At first glance, the Russian expatriate's estimation of his own worth may seem theatrically grandiose, but as the dance critic Rupert Christiansen shows in *Diaghilev's Empire*, his new history of the Ballets Russes and their buccaneering onlie begetter, 'indispensable' was really no overstatement.

Now, 150 years after Diaghilev's birth, the story of the Ballets Russes, its temperamental director and the wild programme of scandals and intrigues that played out both on stage and off is of course well known. But where Christiansen's book comes into its own is in its description of the radical and lasting changes that Diaghilev brought to bear on the art form – changes made all the more striking by some extended, insightful considerations of what came before and after the fact. Part biography, part history of ballet in the 20th century, the book looks at how the larger-than-life impresario was able to take what was at the end of the 19th century the 'childish business' of ballet and not only drag it, often through sheer force of will, into artistic maturity, but also establish it as 'a crucial piece in the jigsaw of western culture'.

Strange though it may seem, ballet was not the obvious choice for the young Diaghilev.





Designs by Léon Bakst for a bacchante in 'Narcisse' (1911) and for Nijinsky in 'L'après-midi d'un faune' (1912), produced by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes

GETTY IMAGES

lev. His first experience of it, in Vienna, had left him cold. But he was drawn to artistic circles and was convinced that his talents could be put to good use there. 'First of all I am a great charlatan,' he confessed to his stepmother in a moment of winning candour. 'Second I'm a great charmer; third I've great nerve; fourth I'm a man with a great deal of logic and few principles; and fifth I think I lack talent.' Where did all this lead? 'I think I've found my real calling,' he explained: 'Patronage of the arts.'

While Diaghilev famously achieved his aim of turning ballet into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* by commissioning such luminaries as Michel Fokine, Igor Stravinsky, Léon Bakst and Pablo Picasso, he also, as Christiansen highlights, frequently employed other less reputable means. Indeed, he had a knack for buying into rule-breakers 'cheap and early', raising their market value with no little investment of time, patience and subterfuge. When a young Vaslav Nijinsky was fired from the Imperial Ballet in 1911 (his refusal to cover his outrageously revealing tights in a production of *Giselle* had so shocked the dowager empress as well as several courtiers that it was deemed a case of *lèse-majesté*),

Diaghilev immediately capitalised on it. Dispatching a telegram to his agent in Paris, he ordered him to spread the story: 'Appalling scandal. Use publicity.' This was the birth of public outrage as a marketing tool, and from the outset the impresario intended to extract everything he could from it.

Diaghilev's self-avowed lack of scruples extended well beyond his pursuit of publicity, too, and Christiansen does not shy from

Diaghilev's quick temper and fragile amour-propre led him to sabotage the careers of several of his own troupe

the more challenging aspects of his life and legacy as viewed today. Time and again we see the impresario taking young and vulnerable dancers to bed in return for patronage as well as a leg up. His directorial-cum-dictatorial tendencies, as well as his quick temper and supremely fragile sense of *amour-propre*, led him to sabotage and even to end the careers of several of his own troupe, and are rightly spotlighted here, although thankfully without veering into the heavy-handed or moralistic.

Perhaps one of the less anticipated aspects of book is that Diaghilev's death in Venice, complete with the dancers Serge Lifar and Boris Kochno brawling over his not quite cold corpse, comes just two-thirds of the way through. In the chapters that follow, the author opts to take a wide-angle view of Diaghilev's many rivals, survivors and successors, marshalling an impressive range of memoir, private correspondence and journalism to provide a convincing and genuinely illuminating sense of the many fields – ballet, art, literature and film – in which his legacy ebbs and flows today.

While Christiansen, as he explains in his preface, may not have set out to 'thrill scholars and experts' with a radical reassessment of Diaghilev's life, he ultimately achieves something else entirely. *Diaghilev's Empire* is a riveting account of a visionary who, for all his many faults, truly did make himself indispensable. Written with sympathy and wit, the book is judiciously researched; but, more crucially, it draws on a lifetime of balletomania, giving readers the benefit of exceptional range. It is also a delicious read into the bargain.

A sadder and a wiser man Brian Martin

Confessions: A Life of Failed Promises

by A.N. Wilson
Bloomsbury, £20, pp. 312

'Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults,' A.N. Wilson seems, on the surface, to have taken to heart the wise words of the Anglican general confession.

Aged 71, he looks back on his life and career and records his regrets and failures both private and professional. His major concern is the failure of his marriage, at the age of 20, to Katherine Duncan-Jones, the Renaissance scholar. Katherine, ten years his senior, was a distinctive Oxford figure, recognisable by her sideways limp and for riding a wicker-basketed sit-up-and-beg bicycle. In later years they reconciled and met weekly for lunch. Wilson records Katherine's sad, slow descent into dementia, which mimics that of one of his chief mentors, Iris Murdoch. Wretched to watch the destruction of great minds.

Most important of his regrets about his professional life are his indiscretion after lunch with the Queen Mother and his mischievous alteration of a book review by Bel Mooney for this magazine. The first made Katherine, among many others, very angry; the second earned him the sack as literary editor.

He now says that he cannot believe that the 'young fogey' of the 1970s and 1980s, dapper, elegantly suited, was him. He describes himself as thrustingly ambitious, full of himself and unfaithful not only to his wife but to his own better nature.

He was an ardent self-promoter. He cites the example of David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham, who, 'showed addiction for cheap publicity'. Wilson reportedly said in the 1970s that he would be prepared to hang

naked upside down from a hot-air balloon if it brought publicity. Naturally this eagerness to capture the public eye brought him enemies. He repelled them, and has done so since. He has been described as reptilian, with a venomous bite; his critical dismissals have been cruel.

Yet he became a prolific novelist, historian and biographer. One of his failures was as an academic. Paradoxically, it became a success, because he subsequently turned himself into a man of letters.

This autobiography has its high points, irrelevancies and irritations. Wilson's exposure of the woefully Dickensian conditions of his prep school, described in another context as 'a concentration camp run by sexual pervers', is horrendous and timely. The pedo-

Descriptions of life as a theological student have the mischievous, observant wit of an accomplished humourist

phile headmaster, Rudolf Barbour Simpson, and his sadistic wife with her 'casual infliction of pain', are denounced. He reflects on 'the strange British custom of sending children to boarding school'. Later, he recounts his experiences as a theological student at St Stephen's House in Oxford. The camp, Firbankian description is written by an accomplished humourist; the mischievous, observant wit is clear and critical.

The failure to become an academic – his career having been largely undermined by one Anne Barton, 'a strange, twitching, blinking, obese figure' – may account for his later exorcisation of academe. As a successful 'jobbing journalist', he castigates universities, which have descended into 'weird' institutions, and wonders why anyone would want to amass a £30,000 debt to attend one.

What does not entertain is Wilson's telling so much of his family history. There are longuours when one wants to shout, 'I don't need to know that', or 'so what?' – an experi-

ence similar to reading Hermione Lee's 992-page biography of Tom Stoppard. Still more annoying is the constant mention of 'the great (but not necessarily) the good' people he knows, which comes across as name-dropping. On one page alone, Ferdinand Mount, Terence de Vere White, 'a wise old friend', 'my old friend' Naomi Lewis, Craig Raime and Lord Snowdon all appear. Elsewhere, C.V. Wedgwood, Victoria Glendening, Humphrey Carpenter, Tanya Harrod, Rowan Williams and many others are all 'friends'.

Wilson sees himself as repentant, sceptical ('to visit any library is to walk past a graveyard of the forgotten') and religious – 'as a confused and very disobedient Christian' – but more agnostic as he grows older. His earlier waspishness has mostly disappeared. But the question remains: why write an autobiography? Is it through strong residual self-regard? The reappraisal of his life, his failures and mistakes, is admirable. Will he need to pen another consideration in five or ten years' time if still scribbling?

Traces of the old venom are still there. He condemns his father's unasthetic successor as managing director of Wedgwood for ruinously transforming the company. Wilson is not easily going to find redemption while he wishes Sir Arthur Bryan a place in Dante's Inferno, where demons stuff wet clay into Bryan's mouth and shove 'red-hot poker up his arse'.

You eat what you see Paul Levy

Dinner in Rome: A History of the World in One Meal

by Andreas Viestad
translated by Matt Baguley
Reaktion Books, £15, pp. 240

Farmer, restaurateur, critic, foodie activist, traveller (he's worked in Zimbabwe as well as South Africa), cookery book writer, longtime TV presenter of *New Scandinavian Cooking*, food columnist for a couple of Norwegian papers as well as formerly for the *Washington Post*, Andreas Viestad's belt has many notches. He lives between Oslo and Cape Town and for 25 years has been a regular visitor to Rome. His favourite restaurant there is La Carbonara, by the Campo de' Fiori, and he has had the strikingly good idea of writing a foodie history of the world by examining a single meal eaten there.

Early in the narrative we get a few lessons in geography, economic history and even contemporary mores. For example, at La Carbonara Viestad notices that some of a group of young friends at a nearby table have made do with simple pasta dishes while others have ordered the expensive grilled sea bass. 'The tradition when eating out is to pay the Roman way, *pagare alla romana*, which





By the flower market in the Campo de Fiori, La Carbonara 'sells the idea of something that never changes'
AAMW

pidity, and prices that are hard to defend'. He was present at a celebrated 2003 salt tasting at Erice in Sicily for scientists and chefs. It turned out that, when dissolved in water, it was virtually impossible to distinguish one from another. It is only their textures that differ, but this determines their gastronomic properties. (The food writer Jeffrey Steingarten was the only participant who could detect differences in a blind tasting of the solutions.)

Viestad's pasta dish was, naturally, carbonara, and he favours Alan Davidson's origin story that the recipe developed immediately after the second world war, when the rations given to American GIs in Rome included bacon, egg and timed cream. Despite the efforts of the Futurist poet and propagandist Marinetti to extirpate pasta from the Roman diet, almost everyone still eats it at least once a day, and the wheat from which it is made is one of the pillars of civil-

Smokestained pictures of rural scenes remind us that the art in restaurants should not compete with the food

isation. There is still debate among archaeologists, historians and anthropologists as to whether cultivating grain was mankind's 'biggest mistake', as Jared Diamond has it. But there is agreement that, as Viestad says:

Grain was the reason we settled in one place and organised ourselves into larger settlements; why we developed organised religion and written language; and what brought us ruling classes, laws and taxes, priests, warriors, and professions that didn't even contribute to the production of food.

Chapters on the discovery of pepper and the evolution of wine lead to the main course, *secondo*, the protein part of the meal, and Viestad orders three tiny grilled spring lamb chops, *abbacchio a scottadito*, from animals that, as Juvenal puts it, 'have not lost their virginity by eating grass'. This leads to some thoughts on domestication, and the issue that, following the transition from hunter-gathering to agriculture, 'the average human height decreased and malnutrition increased'. Richard Wrangham is rightly credited with discovering that cooking made us human since, with more calories accessible through less effort, we were able to evolve larger brains. In the final chapter, on the lemon that goes into his sorbet, Viestad claims that, historically, the Mafia 'controlled most parts of the lemon business'.

Viestad does something a touch radical in this riveting volume: 'I've not used footnotes, something academic readers might find annoying, but I have referred to the source in the text when quoting or relating to reasonings from specific books.' Any annoyance this might have caused is mitigated by a generous guide to these, and to his half-dozen other favoured restaurants in Rome.

involves splitting the bill equally without calculating precisely who has eaten what.'

Viestad's dinner begins with bread. It's light, fluffy and has a crisp crust and doughiness that yields the right amount of resistance when you chew; it's made in the old bakery next door, with its complicated system where you order here, pay there and collect the bread somewhere else, showing the receipt. Rome's geography meant it had limited farm land but a rapidly increasing population, and it quickly became dependent on imported grain, with the river allowing it to build 'an advanced trading system'. Grain that can be stored without spoilage can also be taxed, distributed freely as rations when the populace is feeling squeezed or disgruntled, and used to feed an empire. One ship can carry hundreds of tonnes, whereas oxen might 'cover 12 miles (19km) per day at best, and 22 pounds (5kg) of your load would have to be used as fodder'.

Bread is food, power and also, as Holy Communion demonstrates, symbolic. Controversies about leavening remind us that the Roman tradition is based on matzo, the unleavened bread Jews eat at Passover (not

Easter, the only error I found in this learned volume). Unlike Noma in Copenhagen, our own Fat Duck and other restaurants associated with the molecular gastronomy trend, the point of a Roman eatery such as La Carbonara is that 'it sells the idea of something that never changes'. Familiarity is all – even the 'generic, smoke-stained pictures of rural scenes' which always remind us that the art in restaurants should not compete with the food. Better art might outshine the food, Howard Hodgkin often relished telling the table at dinner.

Rome is outside the butter belt, and you are likely to be served a small saucer of olive oil with your bread, even at breakfast. Viestad's companion at an early stay at an Italian *agroturismo* gave him the clue, and told him to look around: 'Do you see green valleys and cows grazing, or do you see parched hillsides and wizened olive trees? That's the main rule when eating in Italy: you eat what you see.'

Salt was another commodity important to the Roman empire, since it too could be taxed. Viestad has collected many varieties: 'a foodie phenomenon with a touch of stu-



Relief of Medusa's head, from Aphrodisias, Turkey (Roman, 2nd century)

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The curse of Medusa Daisy Dunn

Stone Blind

by Natalie Haynes

Mantle, £18.99, pp. 304

Natalie Haynes has been compared with Mary Renault, the historical novelist who scandalised readers in the 1950s with her unflinching portrayal of homosexual relationships in ancient Greece. While the comparison isn't quite right – their prose styles could hardly be more different – Haynes is certainly alert to what rankles most deeply in modern society, and the ways in which these issues may shape attitudes to antiquity.

In *Stone Blind*, her retelling of the Medusa myth, women emerge from the other side of #MeToo and reveal the gods and heroes for the dolls and sexual predators they always were. 'I'm moving because you're sitting so close that your hip was touching mine and I didn't like it,' Athens explains to Hephaestus. A few moments later, the lame-footed god ejaculates on her thigh anyway, proving that even goddesses have a way to go in making their words count.

The sea god Poseidon is the creepiest. His attempted seduction followed by rape of the young Medusa, and his misreading of her sparring as a come-on, feel uncomfortably true to life. His brother Zeus is simply predictable. As his own wife reflects: 'The only good thing about his sexual incontinence... was its extreme brevity.' Zeus's memories, too, are extremely shortlived. It

The Graiai's comedic potential is obvious once you know they share a single eye and tooth

takes Hera to remind him of the not insignificant fact that any son born to him by Metis will be capable of usurping his throne.

Writers have been mocking the moral duplicity of the gods since Homer. Haynes's approach is more Ovidian in its self-knowledge and humour. Andromeda, one of the many characters she develops in what we might call Medusa's social network, complains of being betrothed to her paternal uncle: 'I don't want to marry a man as old as my father – who even looks like my father.' Haynes puts her former career as a stand-up comedian to particularly good use in

ahilarious chapter on the Gorgons' sisters, the Graiai, whose comedic potential is obvious once you know that they share a single eye and tooth.

Haynes's previous novel, *A Thousand Ships*, was a bestseller. *Stone Blind* is in many ways a more daring and accomplished book, with multiple narrative viewpoints and even a literal talking head. Her women may be down on men, but there's nothing overtly moralising in the way she presents them, nor forced about the modern sentiments she has them express. Less successful are the passages in which she address the reader directly with 'you probably don't need to know this but I'll tell you anyway' type pieces of mood-killing background knowledge. The narrative also meanders towards the end.

There's real tenderness in Haynes's portrait of Medusa, a mortal abomination born into a family of divinities, and the efforts of her immortal Gorgon sisters to protect her from herself. Athens is harder to pin down. A victim one moment, a vengeful goddess the next, her punishment of Medusa is horribly irrational, and not even Haynes is prepared to contort the myth to let her off the hook.

A shameful betrayal David Profumo

The Last Colony: A Tale of Exile, Justice and Britain's Colonial Legacy

by Philippe Sands
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £14.99, pp. 208

Philippe Sands's compelling new book opens in 2018 at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where Liseby Elysé – 'a distinctive lady dressed in black', who can neither read nor write – is making a video statement before 14 judges. In Creole, she describes how, in 1973, she and the last of her 1,500 fellow islanders from Peros Banhos (part of the Chagos archipelago, south of the Maldives) were forcibly deported to Mauritius. They were herded in the dark onto a boat for a four-day passage, with neither notice nor explanation given, restricted to one wooden trunk of possessions apiece, homes abandoned and all their pets rounded up and gassed. The boat's captain said he had 'never transported people in such terrible conditions'. Mme Elysé was four months pregnant, and later lost her child.

The author, a distinguished academic and barrister, then took to the podium, acting for the Mauritian government, and argued that this removal was illegal, as was the original British severance of the islands to set up a new colony in 1965, the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which is the subject of this succinct, impressive work. And it's not some retrofitted anticolonial story, either: the matter is very much current, and unresolved.

For most of us, if we've heard of the Chagos at all it will be because of its militarised atoll of Diego Garcia, which became the site of a US base in 1971, nicely named Camp Justice. The first aircraft to land carried Bob Hope and a troupe of fellow entertainers. Later (after half a billion dollars had been spent developing it), the island apparently became a CIA 'black site' and part of the post-9/11 rendition system. Then, in 2003, it was the launch base for initial air strikes against Iraq.

'I am not an independent observer,' writes Sands. His own involvement with international law is one of the key elements of this saga, which has origins in the 1940s with the United Nations Charter, the setting up of its General Assembly and the new ICJ. Decolonisation and the treatment of 'non-self-governing territories' became a vital issue; and, as it had been at the Nuremberg trials, deportation was classified as 'a crime against humanity'. (Two of the author's great-grandmothers, each with a single suitcase, were deported by the Nazis and perished; his mother was a child refugee.)

When the European Convention on Human Rights was drawn up in 1950, Britain specifically excluded Mauritius from the

list of colonies to which it applied. In 1953, the year Liseby was born, Sir Hilary Blood was the governor of what he termed his 'pocket handkerchief paradise'. She recalled a happy, religious island upbringing: 'We had everything we needed.'

With the deftness of marquetry, Sands lays down the groundwork of international law and its evolution during the Cold War, when he believes both Britain and America were selective and hypocritical in their attitudes toward UN policy. This particularly applied to the 1960 Resolution number 1,514, a few paragraphs about the granting of independence, which asserted: 'All peoples have the right to self-determination.' Both countries, which were covertly discussing security issues, abstained. So, when Mauritian independence was being negotiated, the strategic potential of Diego Garcia was kept secret, though the detachment of Chagos as part of a new BIOT colony was part of the deal.

Anticipating international criticism (not least disapproval from the UN, which was ignored), Britain falsely claimed that there was no 'permanent population' on

The islanders were herded in the dark onto a boat, restricted to one wooden trunk of possessions apiece

the islands, which would have been puzzling news to the Chagossian diaspora that ensued. It is still unclear why we insisted on deporting the inhabitants of the entire archipelago, since the US only required the clearance of Diego Garcia itself. There has never been an apology. When he comes to discuss the Falklands, Sands unavoidably concludes: 'One rule for whites, another for blacks.' If there is an alternative interpretation, I'm sure *Spectator* readers would be interested to hear it.

One of the many merits of this intriguing account of how the case against Britain was finally brought to The Hague is its human focus (enhanced by Martin Rowson's *grand guignol* illustrations), and the author's emotional restraint. His indignation occasionally burns through into sarcasm, but the overall tone is steely. Despite the eventual ICJ ruling

that Britain had acted unlawfully, all requests for resettlement have been resisted. Precious little of the promised compensation has been paid. It is probable that the government is looking for a way to back down without loss of face, but this continued intransigence seems shameful.

Earlier this year, Mme Elysé and some others revisited Peros Banhos for five emotionally charged days. Sands was of their party, and on the last page allows himself to write: 'I find it hard to repress the sense of fury at the wrongs that have been done here.' Yet you feel he has done the islanders proud.

Musicals with a message Christopher Bray

The Letters of Oscar Hammerstein II

edited by Mark Eden Horowitz
OUP, £33.75, pp. 1,054

Tolstoy or Dostoevsky? Picasso or Matisse? Lennon or McCartney? Impossible to call? No such quandary with Rodgers and Hart and Rodgers and Hammerstein. There are those that laugh at the city smarts of the words Larry Hart wrote with Richard Rodgers. And there are those that weep at Oscar Hammerstein's home-on-the-range corn-pone lyrics. But there is nobody that loves them both. Over to the pros then: while the likes of Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald and Tony Bennett have all given us their takes on Rodgers and Hart, nobody but Bryn Terfel has seen fit to make a Rodgers and Hammerstein CD.

Not that Hammerstein would have worried. As Mark Eden Horowitz points out in his introduction to this volume of letters, Hammerstein wasn't interested in having his numbers covered. He didn't think of them as numbers but as parts of a show – and if the show was put together properly, the parts were inseparable from it. Rodgers and Hart musicals don't play much any more. They're lumpy and bitty and slowed to numbness by front-of-curtain scenes in which the characters tell each other the plot. Nothing so rudely mechanical in *Carousel* or *South Pacific*, where the songs arise organically from the action.

Calling Hammerstein 'the most consequential figure in the history of the American musical', Horowitz argues that his shows 'dealt with serious and difficult issues' in order to 'improve his audience'. So in *Show Boat*, written with Jerome Kern, Hammerstein dramatised the horror of racist oppression. In the *King and I* he pointed up the differences between liberalism and monarchism. In *Oklahoma!* he criticised fear of the other. In *The Sound of Music* he aired debates about faith and patriotism.

Among the letters gathered here is one



'Surely there's a better word!'

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Hammerstein at home c. 1944. A contented family man, he was forever turning down work to be with his wife and children

There are heartfelt letters on the folly of war and the need for world government – some to General MacArthur

from a City College student, seeking a ‘personal statement’ for his essay on ‘The Theme of Brotherhood and Tolerance in the plays of Oscar Hammerstein II’. Hammerstein replied by return: ‘I am very happy that

more wrongheaded either. All the evidence is that people are racist until they’re taught not to be.

Which doesn’t mean that Hammerstein was any kind of booby. Though he came from a showbusiness family (his father was a theatre manager; his uncle a songwriter and dramatist; his grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I, a composer and impresario), he started out reading law at Columbia. On the evidence adduced here he’d have made a fine attorney. His letters on the folly of war and on the need for world government – among them some to General MacArthur – are as logical as they are heartfelt. His letter to a commie-baiting Hollywood lawyer would make a fine winding-up speech for a hanging judge.

His responses to what he describes as daily begging letters are politic but penny-pinching. As for his letter to his son Jimmy, who wants money to buy a car, it demolishes

es every one of the kid’s arguments before magnanimously concluding:

If you decide to buy a car after all the evidence is in, and after measuring your own opinion and your own knowledge against the ones I have expressed, there will be no comeback from me. I will assume you have given it very careful thought and have made your own decision, and I will also assume that it is a wise decision, and made honestly.

It’s little wonder that Hammerstein emerges from these letters as a contented family man, forever turning work down to spend time with his wife and children. Good for him – though happiness writes white, and the main reason Hammerstein’s lyrics are also-rams in the Great American Songbook is their childish faith in the goodness of love. While Hart and Cole Porter (tortured homosexuals) and Johnny Mercer (a tortured heterosexual) could write with torrid clarity about heartache and heartbreak, Hammerstein was a Pollyanna on passion.

‘I’m as corny as Kansas in August,’ he has Nellie Forbush sing in *South Pacific*. His own love letters are sweeter than Swiss roll in syrup: ‘Come to me in your glory... Come to me as I’ve dreamed of you... We shall be romantic Olympians in a world of literal mortals. Oh, let us be that, my Goddess – or nothing.’ No, not a randy teen, but a thirty-something desperate to marry wife number two. Horowitz says that while Hammerstein might have lived and worked on a farm in Pennsylvania, he kept an apartment in Manhattan and was no ‘hayseed’. Fair enough. But it was Hammerstein who rhymed ‘petaters’ with ‘ternayers’ while Hart wrote ‘I’d go to hell for ya/ Or Philadelphia’.

The mutterings of the dead Nicholas Lezard

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida
by Shehan Karunatilaka

Sort of Books, £16.99, pp. 368

Ten years ago Shehan Karunatilaka’s first novel, *Chinaman*, was published and I raved about it, as did many others. Set in the 1980s, it intertwined the stories of a vanished, forgotten cricketer who was able to bowl unplayable deliveries and the particularly brutal war that was ravaging Sri Lanka. My review ended with the words: ‘Karunatilaka is, I gather, writing another novel, but how it can be as good as this I can hardly imagine.’ We now have that novel, and I was right: it isn’t as good. Which is not to say it’s bad. In fact, there are parts of its design and telling that are very good indeed. But I had problems with it, as you will see.

We are in 1990, and Sri Lanka is as dangerous a place is it was in *Chinaman*, and

in reality. Maali Almeida is a photographer, gay, a gambler, who likes a drink or two; but his Nikon has a cracked lens and is filled with mud because his body was thrown into a lake after he'd been murdered. This is his afterlife.

At first I wondered if the novel was going to be a replay of *Chinaman*. Would there be any cricket in it, perhaps? No: Karunatilaka swerves right away from that on the first page: 'You left school with a hatred of teams and games and morons who valued them.' (The book is told throughout in the second person.) The first words of the novel are: 'You wake up with the answer to the question that everyone asks. The answer is Yes, and the answer is Just Like Here But Worse.'

That's the afterlife for you: a crowded, bureaucratic nightmare, where ghosts jostle each other, exhibiting the wounds that killed them; and there are plenty of wounds and plenty of ghosts because of the violence tearing the country apart. Imagine an absolutely shambolic version of the afterlife depicted in *A Matter of Life and Death*. There are echoes of Dante's hell, too: Almeida spends a night in a tree: 'Your tree gets crowded with suicides muttering.' (In Dante, the suicides actually become trees.)

Almeida, we are told, has a cache of photographs which will rock Sri Lanka –

gruesome evidence of violence and corruption – and he has seven moons in which to contact his loved ones and lead them to it. A moon in this version of the afterlife is a day, because 'the moon is always up there, even when you can't see it'. OK then. Meanwhile, Almeida's corpse lies dismembered in the depths of Lake Beira, a favoured place for the disposal of the assassinated: 'On this day, the Beira Lake smells like a powerful deity has squatted over it, emptied its bowels in its waters and forgotten to flush.'

And so we have the novel's strengths and weaknesses exposed fairly early on. The strengths are its powerful and pre-

The afterlife is a bureaucratic nightmare, where ghosts jostle each other exhibiting their fatal wounds

cise prose style; the weaknesses are those that are typical of magical realism – a succession of impossibilities that have to be assented to before the reader can get on. I found myself asking: does this make Dante a magical realist? No – but let's address the book's more pressing problem: how much longer will this go on for? Well, just let me say that it took me many moons to finish it.

You can see why Karunatilaka sets his novel in such a dystopian afterlife: it reflects

the reality and at the same time distances itself from it. The ghosts can move around the places 'wherever your body has been', and 'where your name is spoken. But you can't fly to Paris or the Maldives. Unless your corpse is taken there'. The ghosts can ride winds, 'like public transport for dead people'. They can move unseen among the living although, because the available locations are limited, the action switches from the perspective of the dead to that of the living from time to time.

This can be confusing. Early on, a note ('a cheat sheet') that Almeida wrote for an American journalist is reproduced. It explains the abbreviations of all the factions involved in the civil war – or 'the Sri Lankan tragedy', as he more accurately describes it: 'LTTE – The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Want a separate Tamil state. Prepared to slaughter Tamil civilians and moderates to achieve this.' Everyone is prepared to slaughter everyone. 'It's not that complicated, my friend. Don't try and look for the good guys' 'cause there ain't none.'

Would that the rest of the book were so clear. Otherwise it is a smorgasbord of ghouls from which you can, with difficulty, pick out the bones of the recent, awful history of the place – if you are not allergic to magical realism. But I'm afraid the genre is not for me. It is Just Like Here But Worse.

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Missionary position

Alexander Chula on the uncomfortable lessons of the new Fourth Plinth statues

The Revd John Chilembwe – whose statue will adorn Trafalgar Square from next Wednesday – is notorious for the church service he conducted beneath the severed head of William Jervis Livingstone, a Scottish plantation manager with a reputation for mistreating his workers. The night before, Chilembwe's followers had broken into his house and chased him from room to room as he tried to fend them off with an unloaded rifle. Eventually, they pinned him down and decapitated him in front of his wife and children. It was the most significant action in the 1915 Chilembwe rebellion, a small, short-lived affair in an obscure corner of the British Empire today known as Malawi.

It says a lot about our times that a figure with Chilembwe's record should be vaunted with a public statue. The Fourth Plinth Commission announced the decision in July last year, when dispute about statues was intense. The summer before, Black Lives Matter riots had erupted in Britain. Edward Colston was torn down, Gandhi and Churchill were daubed with graffiti. The Chilembwe statue was chosen to shine 'a spotlight on important issues that our society continues to face', said Sadiq Khan. In other words, it was a deliberate salvo in the already heated culture wars. But Chilembwe's real story is an ambiguous one, and I wonder if the Fourth Plinth Commission has got more than it bargained for with this particular contribution to the vexed debate about our past.

The installation is actually a pair of statues: the second figure is John Chorley, an otherwise unremarkable English missionary who was Chilembwe's friend. An iconic photograph exists of the two men standing together, and it is on this that the statues are based. The artist, Samson Kambalu – a Malawian professor of fine art at Oxford – has cast Chorley much smaller, to diminish him and exalt Chilembwe. Nevertheless, what is astonishing is that Chorley should be there at all: a white missionary to Africa is hardly a common subject for public statuary in the age of identity politics.

'We have to start putting detail to the black experience... to the African experience, to the post-colonial experience,' Kambalu has rightly said. And to that end, the story of Malawi is especially useful because it encapsulates so much of Britain's imperial record in Africa. But it comes with a trigger warning: this is not a straightforward tale of black and white, good and evil. The detail is complicated, and sometimes uncomfortable.

Why is Chorley on the plinth with Chilembwe? Ultimately because British missionaries were essential in the formation of modern Malawi. Before their arrival, it was the land that fed the vast Indian Ocean slave trade, whose largest market was in Zanzibar. For centuries, the Arabs and their

It says a lot about our times that a figure with Chilembwe's record should be vaunted with a public statue

indigenous, Islamised accomplices had been capturing and trading slaves in incalculable numbers. David Livingstone called it 'the open sore of the world'. The issue obsessed him and, in response, he stirred up one of the greatest moral crusades of modern times.

From the 1850s onwards, thousands of young men answered Livingstone's call, and volunteered for missionary service in Central Africa. In the early years, they died in droves, mostly of disease, their graves scattered throughout the region, and still venerated today. But their sacrifice was matched by their achievement. The societies they encountered were near disintegration thanks to slave raids, war and the ensuing disorder and famine. When the missionaries proposed peace and goodwill to all men, their message was widely welcomed.

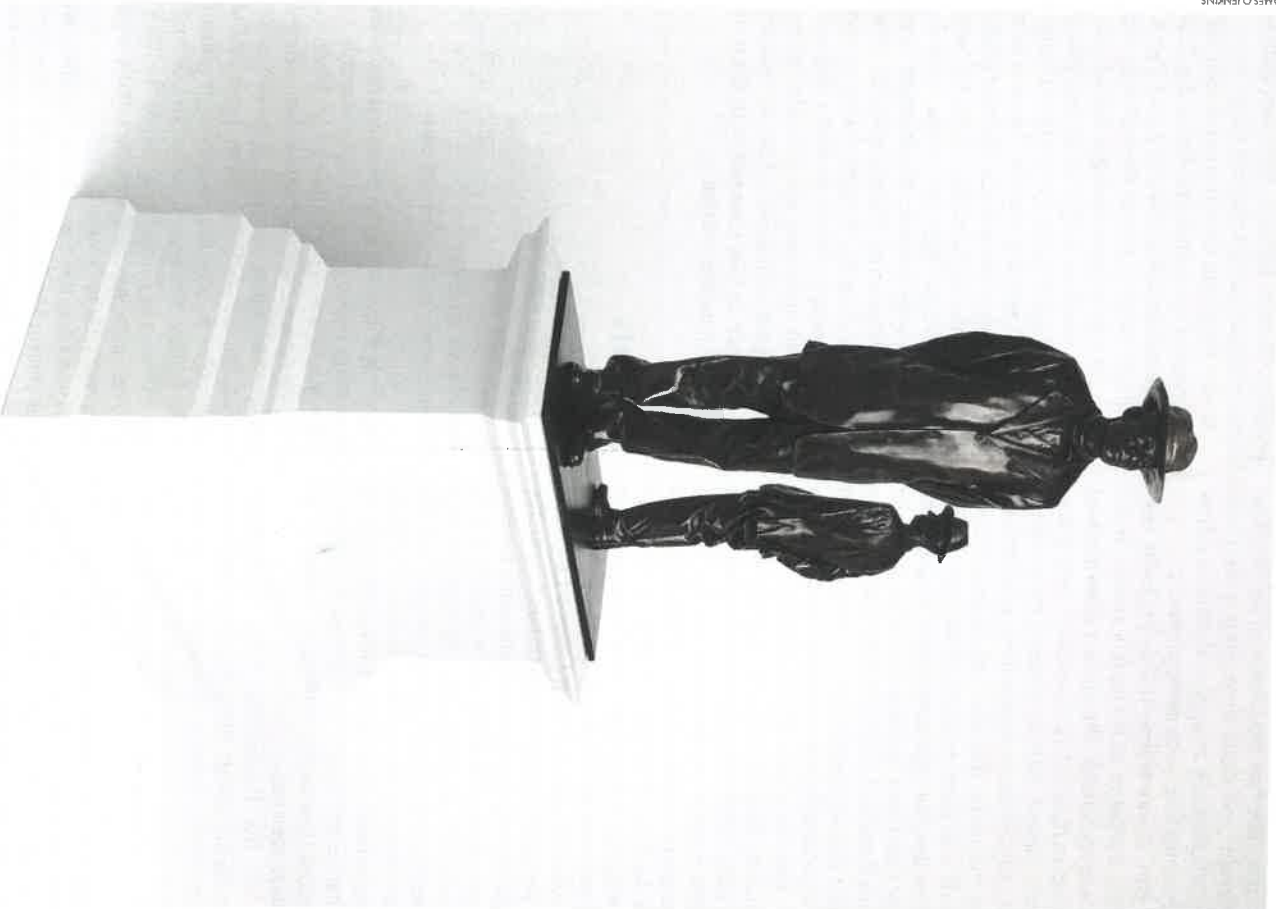
Of course the slavers resisted, and an early attempt at armed confrontation ended in disaster. Thereafter, the missionaries operated mainly just through a heroic appeal to better nature. Only a handful of slaver strongholds were subdued by force after the British government had reluctantly established a protec-

torate in 1891. Otherwise, it is striking how peacefully slavery was extirpated from Malawi. The missionaries then established schools and colleges of towering academic ambition, which quickly produced the first crop of campaigners for independence.

The flip side to missionary endeavour was the colonisation that quickly followed. White settlers and entrepreneurs never came in large numbers as in Kenya or Rhodesia, but the society they created was nonetheless like those that existed throughout the Empire: capable of cruel exploitation, and always permeated with racial injustice. It was against this that Chilembwe reacted with violence.

Born in the 1870s, his mother seems to have been a slave, his father her captor. As a young man, Chilembwe became the servant of an unsuccessful, itinerant English missionary called Joseph Booth, who was to prove the major influence of his life. Booth was a born-again Christian, a socialist, and a fervent critic of colonialism. He was also an enthusiast of an evangelical American cult that believed Christ had returned to Earth a few years earlier and was biding his time until the Battle of Armageddon, scheduled for 1915.

In 1897, Booth took Chilembwe to the United States on a fund-raising tour. The pair were feted by black American churches, and Chilembwe was sponsored to enrol at a Baptist seminary in Virginia. Two years later, he returned to Malawi as a pastor and founded his own mission. At first he prospered, but his radicalism – acquired from Booth and from America – put him at odds with colonial society, which regarded him with suspicion and disdain. He quarrelled with his white neighbours and denounced them and the government in his sermons. This was grudgingly tolerated until the Germans invaded the colony in 1914, and Chilembwe wrote to a local newspaper objecting to Africans fighting in a war that did not concern them. In response, the authorities decided to deport him. His health and business ventures had been deteriorating for some time. It



Samson Kambalu's 'Antelope', soon to adorn the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square

dead, that the treatment they are treating our people is bad, and they might change to the better for our people.' In these words, there is dignity of purpose as well as real foresight by which it is difficult not to be moved. Chilembwe bequeathed an example of defiance, courage and sacrifice. The next generation took inspiration from this, though they chose mostly peaceful means in their pursuit of independence. When this was granted in 1964, one of Chilembwe's own children was still alive to see it.

When you examine the detail, you can ignore neither the injustice nor the beneficence of Empire: both are essential to the story of Malawi. If we celebrate Chilembwe as a hero, there are many others we should also acknowledge, especially the British missionaries: 'Men good and brave who, to

Britain's imperial record in Malawi is not a straightforward tale of black and white, good and evil

advance knowledge, set free the slave, and hasten Christ's kingdom in Africa, loved not their lives even unto death' – to quote the plaque that commemorates them in Zanzibar's Anglican cathedral.

It is these contradictions that Kambalu captures so admirably, and without rancour, in his pair of statues. Our sentimental age needs urgently to be reminded that history is complicated, and the figures who have shaped it are seldom unproblematic. In atonement for his faults, perhaps Chilembwe can now teach us to learn from statues, rather than topple them. Let the Fourth Plinth be his cenotaph, and a place for us all to make peace with our past.

Samson Kambalu's Fourth Plinth commission, 'Antelope', will be unveiled on 14 September. Alexander Chula's book, Goodbye, Dr Banda, on Malawi and the West, will be published by Polygon in March 2023.

was also 1915: the year appointed for apocalypse. In what seems to have been a knowingly reckless decision, Chilembwe incited his congregation to rebellion.

Besides the infamous decapitation, the rebels attacked another plantation manager and a business in the town of Blantyre. But far from rising in support, the local population responded with bewilderment and, later, even hostility. A further attack was attempted on a nearby mission station, with whose leaders Chilembwe had long feuded. But the rebels found the place already evacuated, apart from one sick child too unwell to leave, and a missionary who had stayed behind to look after her. The rebels tried to stab him to death, though he later recovered from his wounds.

Everything then petered out as government forces ruthlessly took control of the

situation. In the aftermath, 36 of the rebels were sentenced to death, 300 imprisoned. Chilembwe fled into the forest where he was hunted down and shot dead by askaris. His final act had been to write to the Germans seeking alliance. Though the message failed to reach them in time, it was an unedifying gesture. Just a few years before, Germany had suppressed a rebellion in its immense colony to the north by massacring up to 300,000 people.

So why should Chilembwe be celebrated at all? It would, from one angle, be easy to condemn him as a murderous lunatic of little real consequence. And yet there is a poignancy to his example. 'We will all die by the heavy blow of the whiteman's army,' he is reported to have said on the eve of the uprising. 'The whitemen will think, after we are

Classical music

A fine romance

Richard Bratby

La Rondine

If Opera at Belcombe Court

Prom 58: Public Service Broadcasting, BBCSO, Jules Buckley
Royal Albert Hall

One swallow might not make a summer, but it certainly helps rounds the season off. 'Perhaps, like the swallow, you will migrate towards a bright land, towards love,' sings the poet Prunier to Magda, the heroine of *La Rondine*, but love itself is the real bird of passage in Puccini's gorgeous Viennese operetta-maqué. Magda trades in her old lover for a younger, cuter model and after a summer of happiness leaves him too, without undue regret. That's basically it. No death leaps from battlements, no ritual disembowelling; none of that stuff that we're meant to find so regressive and problematic in an opera house, and so visceral and cool in an HBO drama. Just a simple, plausible romance, played out to glowing waltz melodies. It's probably Puccini's least popular mature opera.

But on a West Country evening in the last days of summer, as prosecco corks pop gently in the sunset and shadows lengthen across soft green lawns? Come on: it's perfect, and

Puccini's least popular mature opera is perfect on a West Country evening in the last days of summer

nothing will convince me that Michael Voipe, the new executive director of If Opera (the outfit formerly known as Opera at Ilford), didn't choose it for precisely that reason. The venue for If Opera's inaugural season was Belcombe Court, an impossibly pretty manor house just outside the really, utterly, unfathomably pretty town of Bradford-upon-Avon and, well, you're not going to do *Mozzart* in a Conservation Area, now are you? Not that I'd put anything past Voipe, mind, and apparently the plan is for If Opera to be peripatetic – adapting its projects to different venues around the English mid-west.

On opening night, though, we had *La Rondine* in a big tent in the tussocky, lantern-lit gardens of Belcombe Court, with only the half-hourly hooting of the train to Westbury (or possibly Portsmouth Harbour) to puncture the idyll. It was unfortunate that one such blast coincided with the exact moment in Act One where Prunier (Ryan Vaughan Davies) expounds his swallow metaphor for Magda (Meinir Wynn Roberts), and where in Bruno Ravella's production, an animated bird darts and soars across the backdrop. That apart, the opera tent sounded pretty decent: a big, bright

acoustic that took the colours of the 26-piece orchestra and made them ping, even if the cast occasionally struggled to achieve clarity (basic audibility was never an issue).

But it was warm, it was fragrant, and under the baton of If Opera's artistic director Oliver Gooch, Puccini's Lehar-inspired melodies fluttered their eyelashes very seductively indeed. Ravella updated the action to the early 1960s, as required by opera director law, but in the first two acts, at least, Flavio Graffi's designs evoked a jazz-age atmosphere that felt right and looked elegant. The way Graffi and lighting and video designer Luca Panetta lit and framed the wide, shallow stage was a lesson in how to make the most of a potentially awkward performance space.

And the cast? Well, Roberts made a touching Magda, with a generous sound that twined itself around Joseph Buckmaster's tenor in their love duets (he was her toyboy, Ruggero), making the whole ensemble light up. As Prunier, Davies exuded such relaxed vocal charm that it was easy to assume that he was destined to be the romantic lead. As it was, his pairing with Lorena Paz Nieto (a properly sparky soubrette) as Lisette left you wishing that Puccini had made more of their subplot. Puccini clearly understood the convention that operettas are meant to have a serious couple and a comic couple, but like a lot of things in *La Rondine*, he never quite runs with it. This is high-level nit-picking: what he left us is still lovely, and If Opera's production holds out huge promise for future seasons.

At the Proms the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Jules Buckley performed with Public Service Broadcasting, an indie band whose members appear to have stepped from the pages of *The Chap* magazine. Their latest project, *This New Noise*, was a musical celebration of the BBC's centenary. The BBC, we were told, is invaluable and irreplaceable, and the performance ended with the full orchestra walking silently from the stage in the manner of Haydn's *Farewell* symphony, the better to evoke the existential threat that the Corporation currently faces from Market Forces, the Wicked Tories, or

possibly Charles Moore – the exact nature of the menace was not entirely clear.

It was more fun than it sounds, and the hipster beard quotient in the Arena was visibly higher than normal for a midweek Prom. Floodlights strobed around the hall and a big screen showed archive footage: Broadcast-ing House, the Darenty transmitter, and a faintly unhinged visual love letter to Lord Reith, set to pulsing chords. There was a wistful setting of the pre-war German poem 'A Cello Sings in Darenty', sung by Seth Lakeman (Werner Egk once wrote a whole radio opera with that title, which might have made an interesting Proms project). For much of the evening, though, the music did what pop groups always do when they get access to an orchestra: use it to play grandiose backing harmonies while the rockers noodle more or less inaudibly out front. It received a standing ovation.

Podcasts

Pod wars

Daisy Dunn

The News Agents

Apple, Spotify and other platforms

The competition between news-led podcasts is nearing boiling point. If you tuned in to *The Media Show* on Radio 4 last Wednesday, you'd have felt the tension between the podcasters leading the guard: Alastair Campbell of *The Rest Is Politics*, Jon Sopel of *The News Agents*, plus his executive producer, Dino Soflos, Nosheen Iqbal of the *Guardian's Today in Focus*, and Adam Boulton, who has just launched a politics show with Kate McCann on Times Radio.

Kiran Moodley and Minnie Stephenson might reasonably have joined this line-up as they launch a new series of their news pod with Channel 4 this week. *The Fourcast*, like *The News Agents* (where Sopel is joined by Emily Maitlis and Lewis Goodall), will cover a mixture of geopolitics and home stories, but on a weekly basis, *The News Agents* is daily. Both will be accompanied by video and, in the case of *The News Agents*, TikTok content. And let's not forget there's *Newschat* on BBC Sounds.

The feeling among these zealous newscasters is not that radio is dead, exactly, nor that TV has had its day. It's more that the culture of headlines and soundbites now associated with them, compounded by social media, has altered the way we digest hard news. The thing about a podcast is you can't half-listen to it. The intimacy of the format makes it the perfect conduit for in-depth analysis you will actually take in.

The News Agents stretches this idea by layering interviews and commentary in a sophisticated, almost book-like manner,



'You do realise that's a watercolour.'

which rewards close listening. The first episode, on the FBI raid on Trump's residence at Mar-a-Lago, moved between conversations with Anthony Scaramucci, the president's former director of communications, Mick Mulvaney, his former chief of staff, a law professor, and reflections from the podcast hosts themselves.

The episode was hooked on a prediction made by a US senator the night before that there would be riots in the event of Trump's prosecution. More pressing, perhaps, was the desire to hook in the existing fanbase of Sopol and Maitlis's previous podcast, *Americast*, with an America-themed opener. It could be no accident that the BBC released a fresh series of that podcast with a 'new administration' of presenters the very week *The News Agents* debuted. The topic of the first episode? Mar-a-Lago. As I said, the competition is hot.

For their new venture Sopol and Maitlis are clearly keen to slough their suits. They joke that 'news agents' means something different in the UK ('Fags, mags and a Twix') from in the US (spies with dictaphones), and you can't help but picture 'Sopes' as Austin Powers to Maitlis's Miss Moneypenny, only with more clout and less cojones. They are here to explain, but they don't want to be teachery, so Maitlis asks questions she already knows the answer

to, and Sopol fesses up to stealing ashtrays from hotel rooms, while Lewis dissects Jar-gon at the blackboard and listeners throw out questions from the back row.

This makes *The News Agents* very different in tone from *The Americast*. In content, though? It's equally serious. While *The Rest Is Politics* tends to offer the insider's view of how to tackle problems at No. 10, *The News Agents* retains the wide panorama of a news programme, while sinking its teeth into the small print. The main thing that puzzled me about the first episode was why no one raised

The competition between news-led podcasts is nearing boiling point

the matter of Trump's age with regards to the prospect of a prison sentence galvanising a future presidential campaign.

The podcast is still young and it remains to be seen whether the sort of matiness that sees Maitlis repeatedly address Scaramucci as 'The Mooch' will grate, or help draw out the more buttoned-up interviewees. It's promising that neither Michael Gove nor former cabinet secretary Gus O'Donnell have clammed up, suspecting subterfuge. The competition is strong, but the adrenaline is up in this team, and it's good to hear them revel in it.

Cinema

Gore-fest meets snooze-fest Deborah Ross

Crimes of the Future 18, Nationwide

You always have to brace yourself for the latest David Cronenberg film, but with *Crimes of the Future* it's not the scalpels slicing into flesh or the mutant dancer with sewn-up eyes (and mouth) or even the filicide (oh, boy) you have to brace yourself for. In this instance, the most shocking thing is that it's so muddled and dreary. It's a gore-fest, true enough, but it's a gore-fest that is mostly a snooze-fest. That's what you need to brace yourself for.

I first became acquainted with Cronenberg when, as a young teenager, I bunked off to see *Shivers* (1975) and while every film since (*The Fly*, *Crash*, *Eastern Promises*, *History of Violence*) has proved difficult, as I am squeamish, I always felt I'd left the cinema with something and had been in the presence of a master filmmaker. But here, when it was over, I felt nothing but relief. Thank God that's done, is all I thought.

This is set at some unspecified time in the future in a world that's a peeling, rotting

JANE PATTERSON

14 September – 7 October 2022

Monday - Friday 10.00-5.30
Saturday by appointment

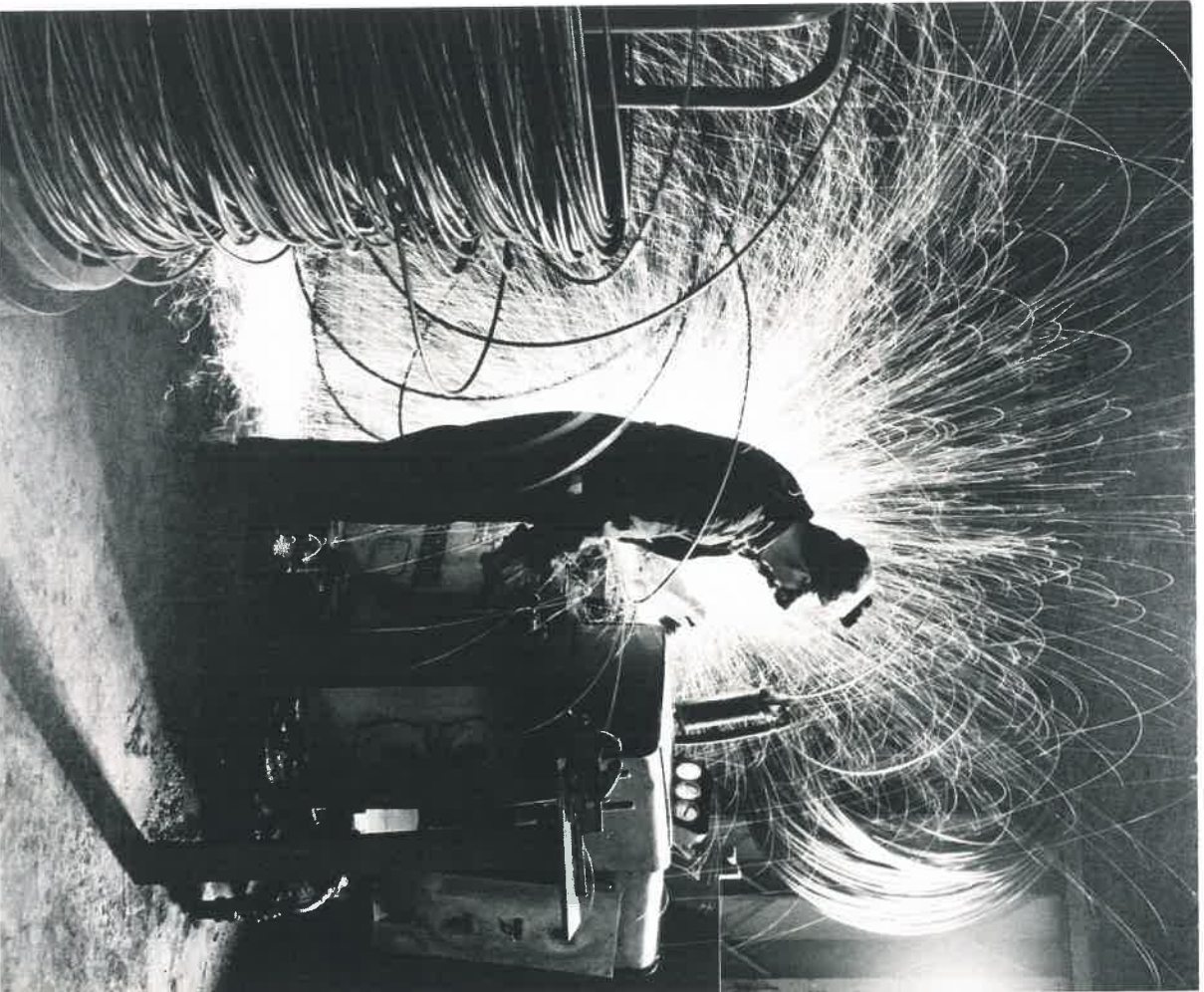
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19 Cork Street London W1S 3LP
Tel: (44) 020 7734 7984 Fax: (44) 020 7851 6660
E-mail: art@browseanddarby.co.uk
www.browseanddarby.co.uk

Dymock Flowers, oil on canvas, 2020, 56 x 46 cm



© ESTATE OF MAURICE BROOMFIELD



'Wire Manufacture', 1964, by Maurice Broomfield, taken at the Somerset Wire Company, Cardiff Factory

Very few of his photos give the impression that anything in particular is being made. The Somerset Wire Company appears to be producing sparks more than wire; in his shot from a paper mill in Northfleet, the paper dissolves into a wash of light and speed. His lens turned all these factories into theatres: places that existed not for the production of cars or wire or electricity, but images.

Critics often compare Broomfield's images to the art that was, in his heyday, coming out of the Soviet Union. The same reverence for huge machines, the same thrill at industry for its own sake: the people in Soviet paintings aren't really producing cotton or steel

either, but socialism. But Broomfield mostly worked on commission for the factory owners themselves; his photos were used to illustrate company reports. His workers stand heroically alone, faceless, with nothing to suggest

For a moment, the factory workers are frozen as the masters of the world

they might have any human existence outside the factory gates. There's certainly no hint of the unfreedom of working-class life, the same thing that sent him fleeing the Rolls-Royce factory in Derby. Still, his admiration for his

subjects is obvious. Their skill, their power, the vast forces they control. For a moment, the factory workers are frozen as the masters of the world.

A lot has changed since. There's a funereal tone hanging over the V&A's exhibition of his photographs. The short blurb by the door reminds us that 'many of the factories he photographed – and the communities of workers and skills that supported them – have either vanished or been subsumed into global corporations'. Placards inform us when each site closed. A short film – narrated by Broomfield's son – shows footage of smokestacks being dynamited, and the concrete husks of what was once Brit-

ish industry. All that grandeur feels different now. Ozymandias in Dagenham, building the ruins of the future.

In the 2020s, we all became miniature Maurice Broomfields: working from home, performing a little theatre of labour for whoever might be watching through our webcams. No dark machinery, just millions of blank faces looking at screens. The art world is still fascinated by technology, but there's no burning wire or molten steel in sight. Sotheby's sells procedurally generated ape cartoons; artists live-mint NFTs in converted warehouses. We've all become so very, very small.

Theatre

Rhapsodic banalities

Lloyd Evans

I, Joan

Shakespeare's Globe, in rep until 22 October

London Zoo

The Bread & Roses Theatre

'Trans people are sacred. We are divine.' The first line of *I, Joan* at the Globe establishes the tone of the play as a public rally for non-binary folk. The writer, Charlie Josephine, seems wary of bringing divinity into the story too much, and he gives Joan a get-out clause to appease the agnostics.

'Setting aside religiosity we'll settle for more of a street god, a god for the queers and drunks... a god for the goddess.' What can 'a god for the goddess' mean? No idea. Joan throws in a few more hipster platitudes about 'elevating our humanity, finding the unity hidden inside community, remembering our collective connectivity fuels cou-

*One feared the consequences
of not joining in, or of not
honking loudly enough*

rageous creativity [*sic*]. At press night these rhapsodic banalities were cheered so aggressively that one feared the consequences of not joining in, or of not honking loudly enough.

Act One traces Joan's military successes as she leads the Dauphin's army to Reims (or 'rants' as the actors pronounce it). In the second half, her battlefield skills desert her and she's accused of witchcraft by 42 black-clad judges.

Historically the piece is accurate but the costumes and the moral tone are snugly rooted in today's culture rather than in Joan's. The medieval court has been designed like a skate park with a rear wall arranged as a wooden chute which the actors climb up and whoosh down comically. It's funny the first

six or seven times. Then it gets tiresome.

Joan's rhetoric becomes a little grating as well. She shrieks that she's 'full of God' rather too often, and she has a habit of complaining that the dictionary lacks the words to express her complex, subversive and multi-layered personality. But that's true of us all. And it's a peculiar complaint to hear from the central character in a three-hour play devoted to her unique story.

At the Dauphin's court, she befriends a chap called Thomas who shares her anxieties about her identity and who offers her succour and encouragement. Which is very handy for her but it diminishes the intensity of her dramatic mission. Joan is a teenage prodigy who seeks to change the course of history in an era of warlords and knights. So why does she need a male accomplice to help her out? A solitary struggle would be more gripping.

The court is nominally ruled by the Dauphin, who lazes around in tennis whites and listens to bad advice from his prattling all-male cabinet. After his coronation, he strips down to a pair of M&S underpants. The point is to portray him as an emasculated halfwit but this malign characterisation is rescued by Jolyon Coy's superbly languid comic performance. Some of his scenes are as funny as *Blackadder*. The Dauphin appears not to mind that his court has been taken over by women. His heavily pregnant wife, Marie, orders him to carry the train of her dress as she strides around glaring imperiously at terrified underlings.

Marie is herself dominated by her mother, Yolande (Debbie Korley), who wears a shrill blue power frock, like Mrs Thatcher. She revels in her triumphant femininity. 'In this world of men,' she declares, 'if you want anything done well, hire a woman.' The audience cheered that statement like a bunch of brainwashed Young Conservatives in the 1980s. To portray the court as a matriarchy is an amusing piece of mischief but it also mars the drama by weakening Joan's rebellion against male authority. What's the point of this yarn if women rule already?

The show's best feature is the inventive music performed by three excellent percussionists in an upper gallery. But the grinding length of the script undermines its value as entertainment. How come no one at the Globe suggested editing a few speeches and trimming the repetitive dance routines? Too scared, perhaps.

Farine Clarke's *London Zoo* looks at the dog-eat-dog world of newspaper publishing in the 1990s. The internet is causing newsstand sales to fall but one title, the *Daily Word*, has posted a rise in circulation. This makes it a target for bosses at the ruthless UK National News Group who want to buy the paper, boost its advertising income and bank the profits. This is an age-old dilemma. Should the readership or the advertisers govern a paper's editorial direction? Tradi-

tional wisdom states that the readers are king but the yuppies at the news group want to defy that rule and make off with the loot.

We follow the journey of Arabella, a sensitive graduate who has to navigate the shark tank with the support of an amiable but weak accountant Charles. They're opposed by the avaricious Christian, a self-adoring misogynist, who makes no secret of his amoral nature. Though set in the media world of the last century, the themes of manipulation and greed feel perfectly up to date.

Television

In all seriousness

James Walton

The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power

Amazon Prime

Arena: James Joyce's Ulysses

BBC4

Amazon's much-heralded Tolkien prequel *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* began by answering a question that has puzzled humankind – and possibly elves – these many millennia. Why is it that a ship floats and a stone doesn't? The reason apparently is because 'a stone sees only downward', whereas a ship has 'her gaze fixed upon the light that guides her'.

And this, I'm afraid, set the tone for much of the dialogue that followed in the two episodes released so far – as, to their credit, the characters managed to exchange an endless series of ponderous aphorisms without giggling. So it was that we learned

*The characters managed to exchange
an endless series of ponderous
aphorisms without giggling*

how 'the wine is sweetest for those in whose bitter trials it has fermented'; how 'the same wind that seeks to blow out a fire may also cause it to spread'; and, more pitifully, how 'there can be no trust between hammer and rock'.

On the plus side, any pedants watching will have been delighted by the scrupulous observance of old-school linguistic rules. There was, for example, no sloppy use of objective pronouns ('No one yearns for home more than I'), a deep if sometimes effortful commitment to not ending a sentence with a preposition and even the widespread avoidance of anything so vulgar as an abbreviating apostrophe in phrases like 'I cannot'. Unfortunately, however, that only added to the sense of a show creaking under the weight of its own solemnity.

As you probably know by now, *The*

Rings of Power is the most expensive TV series ever made. Although if you didn't, it wouldn't have been hard to guess, given how assiduously the programme kept drawing attention to the fact, underlining every admittedly spectacular cityscape and aerial shot with wildly swelling choral music.

So, you might be wondering, what about the plot? Well, there's quite a lot of that too. Leading the way is Galadriel (Morfydd Clark) who, centuries before she became a wise immortal queen, was a wise immortal kick-ass heroine, able to take out a snow-troll with a few showy twirls of her sword, and unfashionably convinced that the threat from Sauron hasn't gone away. Further down the social scale a village of harfoots – whose accents, after an initial burst of all-purpose rustic, settled down into the kind of stage-Irish normally accompanied by shillelaghs – have spotted strange portents in the sky. A group of folks in mad hats are being menaced by monsters. Oh yes, and a top Elven designer is working on what appears to be some sort of ring...

No doubt the programme's undeniable professionalism will ensure that these elements come together. Yet, after these two hours of mostly self-regarding spectacle, I can't pretend I'm massively intrigued as to

The cast are forced to take refuge in the trusty old tactic of hamming it up and hoping for the best

how. Granted, there are occasional quieter moments. But even these are buried beneath so many layers of costume and set design that the cast are often forced to take refuge in the trusty old tactic of hamming it up and hoping for the best. And all the time, that central problem remains: that if *The Rings of Power* were to go on a dating website, one attribute it could never claim for itself is GSOH.

In the 1990s, I went on a James Joyce walking tour of Dublin led by his nephew Ken Monaghan (son of Joyce's much younger sister). Even then, what was particularly striking was the totality of Joyce's victory. When Ken was growing up, his family forbade him from mentioning his connection with such an obscene, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic writer. Now, of course, it was source of enormous pride – and a handy source of money, as Joyce tourism began its takeover of the city, thanks to a novel that not many people have ever read.

On Wednesday *Arena*: *James Joyce's Ulysses* confirmed this strange triumph as it celebrated the book's 100th anniversary with a pitch-perfect documentary that, like *Ulysses* itself, was both meandering and coherent, funny and serious, kindly and irreverent.

Amid Adam Curtis-style snippets of vaguely related footage, an archivist proudly showed us the street directories and news-

papers the exiled Joyce used to recreate 16 June 1904, the day – plot spoiler alert – that Leopold Bloom walks around Dublin (a date Joyce touchingly chose because that was when he received his first handjob from Nora Barnacle). An impressive collection of talking heads including Anne Enright, Colm Tóibín and Howard Jacobson took us through Joyce's life and career, the genesis of the novel and its agonising journey into print. A selection of the book's greatest hits were illuminatingly discussed.

On a more melancholy note, the programme also featured Salman Rushdie at his most twinkling – even though when he first read *Ulysses*, it rather put him off his dreams of becoming a writer. 'I thought, well I can't do that,' Rushdie told us with perhaps uncharacteristic modesty. 'Plus he's done everything.'

Dance Dieu de la danse Rupert Christiansen

Nureyev: Legend and Legacy

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane,
until 12 September

I was never Rudolf Nureyev's greatest fan. I must have seen him dance 30 or 40 times, starting with a *Bayadère* in the mid-1960s, and while his sheer presence remained so potent that he was always exciting to witness, I became increasingly aware of how fiercely willed his dancing was – a struggle with or against his own body, almost self-punishing (he believed that he performed at his best when he was totally exhausted). His final appearances, when he was showing symptoms of the Aids that killed him in 1993, were truly painful to watch on that score. He really had nothing left to give, but the compulsion remained.

Closer to my heart was his near-contemporary Anthony Dowell, with his noble modesty and feline beauty of line; and then came his younger compatriot Mikhail Baryshnikov, whose technique was far superior and whose art was infused with a joyful insouciance more appealing to me than Nureyev's ferocious Tartar intensity. They were lovely; Nureyev you could only worship.

What an ego, what a personality, however – and it should be said that despite his hellraiser reputation, he was a highly disciplined professional and his colleagues generally adored him. Born to be the centre of attention, he was blessed with what is commonly called charisma and a face as dangerously beautiful as Garbo's: you simply had to watch him, even if he was standing at one side and some fabulous ballerina was spotlight. Nobody could make an entrance like he did – a quality Ashton exploited in *Marguerite and Armand*, where he burst on to the stage at a breakneck run, suddenly halted, then froze in a pose of palpating ardour. And even though he was not that spectacular airborne, objectively analysed, he could make you think that he was (Nijinsky, one suspects, had the same trick).

In any case, like him or not, he has become ingrained in the mythology of ballet, as this gala *Nureyev: Legend and Legacy*, curated by Nehemiah Kish, set out to demonstrate. It was a sincere and courageous effort to honour this *dieu de la danse*, but like so many of these ad hoc affairs it was hampered by endless rounds of clapping-clap, last-minute substitutions, an absence of any real thematic coherence and a shortage of money – with the orchestra perforce located on stage behind a scrim, there were no backcloths and only very restricted lighting. The result looked inelegant and did the dancers no favours.

Nureyev's limited talent as a choreographer was showcased in the tasteless solo that he devised for himself in his productions of *The Sleeping Beauty* – a typically busy affair, overburdened with ostentatiously complex steps, faithfully reproduced here

Nureyev was blessed with what is commonly called charisma and a face as dangerously beautiful as Garbo's

by Guillaume Côté. Even worse were his horribly vulgar reworkings of Soviet war-horses like the *Gayaneh* pas de deux and the *Laurencia* pas de six, which even Natalia Osipova's brash brilliance couldn't redeem. Including a passage from one of Nureyev's full-length original ballets from Paris, unfamiliar to London audiences, would have made the programme more representative. Iana Salenko and Xander Parish (the British dancer who joined the Mariinsky from the Royal Ballet and has migrated to Oslo since the Ukraine invasion) offered a disappointingly flat account of the exquisite *Bayadère* Act Three pas de deux, and William Bracewell and Francesca Hayward couldn't make much of the Act Two *Giselle* pas de deux in this prosaic context either. With Natascha Mair and Vadim Muntagirov contributing a *Sleeping Beauty* pas de deux as well, the classics were over-represented.

A few consolations made the evening worthwhile, notably Francesco Gabriele Frola's fleet footwork in Bournonville's enchanting *Flower Festival in Genzano*; Alina Cojocaru dancing with sublime understated eloquence in an excerpt from John Neumeier's *Don Juan* alongside Alexander Trusch, an intriguing Ukrainian based in Hamburg; and Cesar Corrales and Yasmine Naghdi fizzing through the camp bravura of *Le Corsaire* pas de deux to send everyone home happy. But Nureyev was about so much more than this suggested.

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NOTES ON...

Metal detecting

By Nigel Richardson

Some detectorists will tell you that the holy grail of metal detecting is a hoard of Roman coins or Anglo-Saxon jewellery. Others will point out – borrowing a line from the TV series *Detectorists* – that actually the holy grail of metal detecting is the Holy Grail. Since I took up metal detecting, last summer, I have tried to set myself more modest goals.

They can be summed up in some wise words spoken to me in a field in Wiltshire after I'd suffered a near-barren day (my only finds having been a musket ball and 'canslaw' – a shredded drinks can). 'A find is a bonus, a good find is a good bonus,' said my fellow detectorist with a consoling hand on my shoulder.

My companion could afford to be sanguine – he was none other than the great Dave Crisp, finder of the Frome Hoard of Roman coins (52,503 of them) in 2010 and a poster boy for metal detecting due to the exemplary way in which he alerted the archaeological authorities once he'd unearthed the hoard.

The day I went out with Dave on the North Wessex Downs he bagged another half-dozen 'Romans', scattered across a field where he reckoned there had been a camp. It was his 'permission' – land on which the owner permits you to detect – and he had



taken me there to enable me to find my first Roman coin, a rite of passage for detectorists. In other words he had led the horse to water. But the horse was unable to drink – and now stood there long-faced; a parched, useless Dobbin.

This sense of failure – and envy of other detectorists' success – had become familiar to me in my fledgling detecting career. I had tried to fight it, I really had. But it would just pop up – most shamefully a few months earlier in a freshly cut field in Oxfordshire.

Muffled up despite the humidity, a man was detecting near me when he shouted out 'Hammered!' and performed a briefing in the stubble, a mini-version of the 'gold dance' that detectorists are supposed to do when

they find the ultimate precious metal. Finding a 'hammered' coin – handmade, usually medieval – is another yardstick by which detectorists measure themselves and needless to say I was yet to find one. So when I witnessed this performance I felt sick to the stomach.

My mood darkened further when the detectorist walked over and insisted on sharing the moment with me. Then he explained why it meant so much – he had spent the previous few months undergoing treatment for cancer. This was the first time in a long time he had been outdoors and it had paid off with a lovely little find. Life was not, after all, unrelenting misery.

Though he didn't know it, he showed me how to become a better person – as, unwittingly, did other detectorists. People like wise old Dave Crisp and a blind chap called Dean, who lost his sight in adulthood but still has a detailed map of his bit of Romney Marsh in his head.

I do find stuff. I'm not a complete waste of space as a detectorist. But I have come to realise that metal detecting is not really about finding hoards or hammered. At the risk of sounding cheesy, it's about digging out and prizing the best bits of yourself. Mind you, I've practised the gold dance just in case.

DATING

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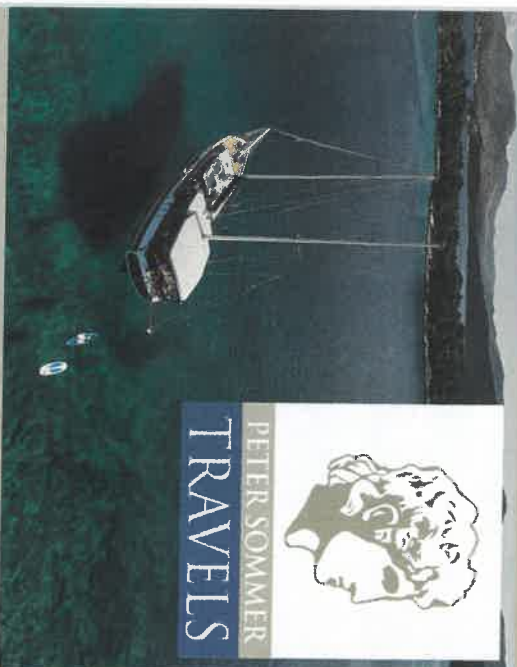
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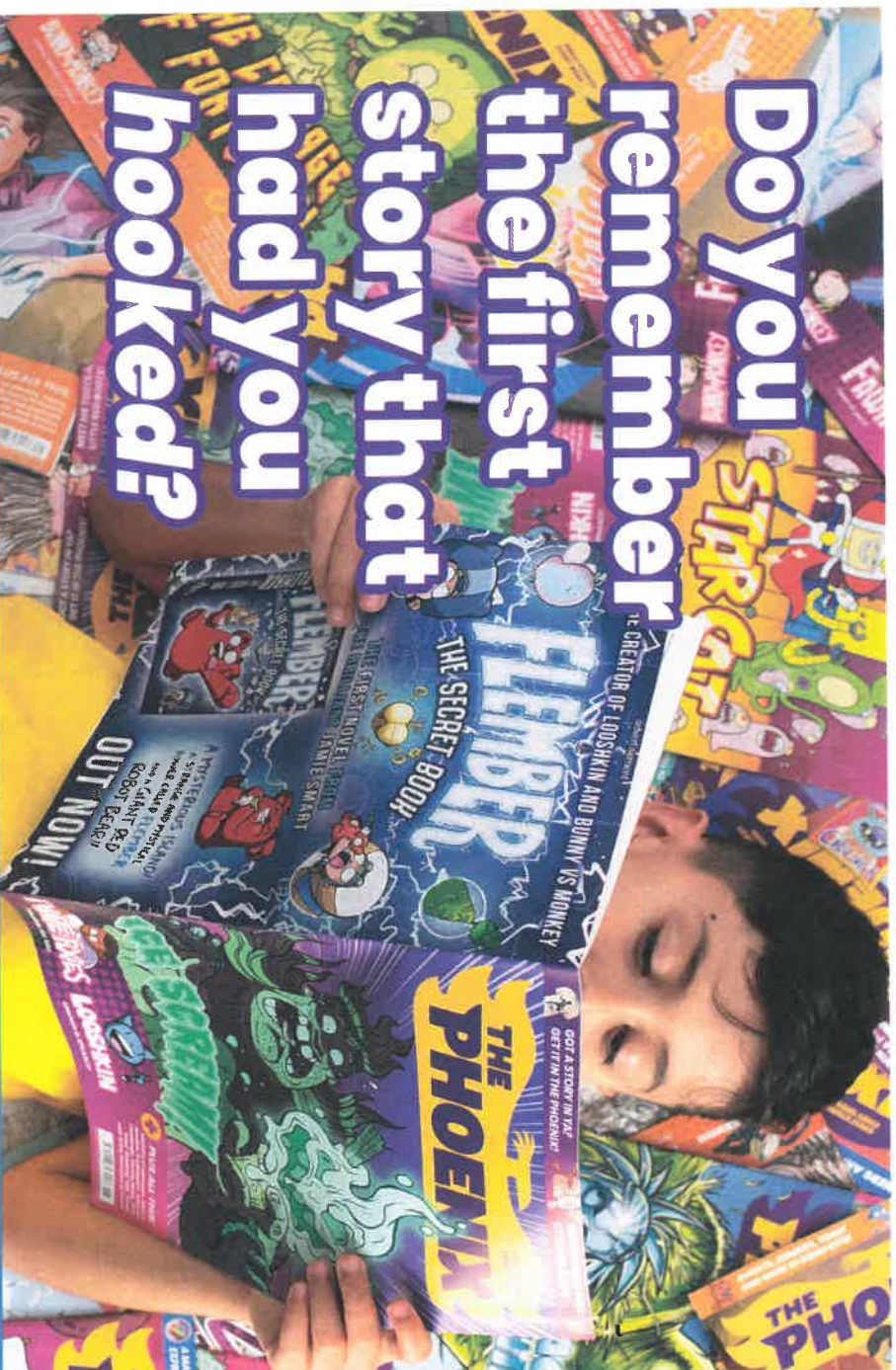
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There's a nothingness here which is very pleasing. All great cities should have pockets of nothingness

— Tanya Gold, p62

LIFE

High life

Taki



Gstaad

There's a *fin de saison* feeling around here, but the restaurants are still full and the sons of the desert are still moping around. Building is going on non-stop and the cows are down from the mountains, making the village a friendlier and more civilised place. Something of a twilight mood has crept in, especially when I compare the cows with the people. Reclaiming vanished days is a sucker's game, but it's irresistible. I was up at my friend Mick Flick's chalet the other afternoon, talking with Gstaad regulars about how much fun the place used to be. I tried the reverse of an old Woody Allen joke, announcing that taxis nowadays are so expensive I couldn't keep my eyes on the lovely legs of the lady riding next to me. It went down like the proverbial lead balloon, but then we were all drunk to begin with.

Never mind. The farrier sex in Gstaad is mostly represented by ladies whose chief resource has always been their beaux. Some of them who haven't received the seal of marriage can look a bit desperate, with begs under their eyes and a boozy roll at their waists. Their meters, in other words, are running, and we know that men keep their eyes firmly on those meters, in taxis or elsewhere. Until I got old, older women attracted me. They still do, and up at Mick's the other afternoon, when asked by an old maid-*en* whose youth had been a wild one where my wife Alexandra was, I told her that she was nine months pregnant and in bed. Bravo, Taki, was her response.

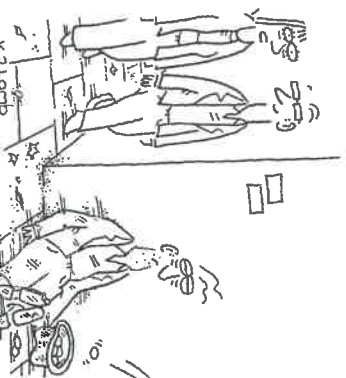
I suppose attraction to older women was inevitable after a little romance at 21 with the French wife of a Greek ship owner led to my banishment to Paris. That was some price to pay. Paris at 21. It actually traumatised me for life. Parisian society was open to young horny types because most men kept mistresses, and French wives accepted it but retaliated with young arrivals to the city of light. Looking back, I sacrificed myself for women's equality, stunting my tennis career

and many other things I cannot recall at this moment. Adultery is to French men what name-dropping is to Hollywood agents, as is the paycheck by their wives. Unlike, say, my mother, who would cross herself and pray that my father wasn't sinning, which he was non-stop, French ladies remained good mothers and perfect hostesses, loved their hubbies and respected the institution of marriage. And they had assignments with poor little Greek boys whenever possible.

That winter in Gstaad, it was *déjà vu* all over again. When one is 21, most women one meets at chic parties are older, hence the attraction to oldies, or so I'm told by my shrink, whom I've never actually met or talked to. In fact, the bum does not exist, but if he did, I'm sure that's what he would say if I asked him why I still find older women attractive. Paris, Gstaad, Paris, the Riviera, then Paris again; that was the cycle, and what can I tell you, dear readers, it was shameful, sinful, and a waste of time. But it was oh, so much fun that I wouldn't change it for all the marching powder in Bolivia.

But enough of all this nostalgia. They say one should live for the present, but present life can be awfully degrading. Mind you, military doctrine has it that lucky generals are preferable to good ones, and that applies to marriages also. I've been lucky as hell: Alexandra has put up with my shenanigans for 51 years because I've never taken anything seriously where the fair sex is concerned, and have never preferred anyone to her. I have crushes all the time, chase skirt non-stop, but I'm a one-woman man. In fact, I think I should get an award from some marriage bureau or something. And I don't care what anyone says, a stable home is the best thing one can give children.

A happy family is as good as it gets, but I've discovered another route to peace of



Norman's taken up coin collecting.

mind and spirit: a total abstinence from social media. About 15 or so years ago, while writing for a New York weekly that eventually morphed into Takimag, an online magazine run and edited by my daughter, I got a taste of the venom, hatred, malice and bile shown by the dregs of society if and when given the opportunity to display it. Unknowns would write in wishing people dead and telling the most egregious of untruths in order to make their sick point. Although I've been around more than most people, it was a first for me. I simply could not understand or believe how bitter and hateful people could be, especially when reading something they disagreed with or, in my case, when I described a lifestyle they could never afford or imagine living.

Envy must be at its most painful when there's nothing the envious one can do about it. I am not about to change the way I live or the things I believe in, so the envious ones will just have to live with it. Oh yes, I almost forgot. I did away with the right to respond unless the complaint was valid. And I have never read or looked at anything online; never communicated on social media with anyone except *The Spectator*. Hence I'm a very happy man.

Low life

Jeremy Clarke



In Frederic Manning's classic Great War novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, the shattered battalion shambles out of the line after battle to parade briefly before being dismissed. Noting a general loss of soldierly comportment as the infantrymen limp into camp, a watching NCO urges: 'Come on, get hold of it now.' As my bone pain worsens, passing milestone after milestone with dismaying rapidity, Manning's anonymous fictional NCO speaks that expressive army phrase into my mind. He gives the order sternly, with unmistakable undertones of regimental pride and kindness.

Milestones passed so far: single site intermittent bone pain easily tolerated; single site continuous pain, easily managed by

half a gram of paracetamol; multiple site bone pain, intermittent, ditto; continuous multiple site bone pain, tramadol 50mg four times a day. Then 100mg four times a day. Then nothing in my bedside drawer pharmacy overcomes it entirely. That's when the NCO clears his throat. At present the pain is confined to both shoulders and left shoulder blade. Other milestones further down the hill can be guessed at.

Last week taxi man Gilles picked me up at the bottom of the path and drove me to the hospital at Marseille. The holiday month of August was a welcome break from hospital corridors, taxis, scanners, blood tests, consultations. September began with a thorax scan. I felt shrivelled as I climbed in the back of his VW. 'Do I look different?' I asked him. Gilles has driven me back and forth to Marseille for two years now. 'No,' he said. The denial was unconvincing. I sucked in my cheeks. 'Not even this?' I said. He looked away. 'A little,' he said.

Three hours sitting upright in the back of Gilles's taxi did for me. The next day every pain site had a blow torch aimed at it and I spent it lying down doped to the eyeballs. I got up from the bed just once, at lunchtime, to take a bottle of champagne out of the fridge and drink it with Catriona and her

The idea of living with seven Benedictine nuns had altered from a light-hearted gamble to a necessity

daughter and daughter's boyfriend at an outside table. Another milestone reached that day was not having the strength in either arm to ease out a champagne cork. I revisited Lytton Strachey's self-parodying joke for children by trying and failing to lift a spent matchstick from the table.

Neither tramadol nor high-octane codamol damped the pain that afternoon. Now it starts, I thought. Nine years after diagnosis, the coach is at the door at last. ('The eager children, mounting fast/ And kissing hands, in chorus sing/ Good-bye, good-bye, to everything!' Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Farwell to the Farm'.) And this scarcely conceivable pain is probably just my starter for ten. 'Come on, get hold of it now,' muttered the NCO. But still: nine years isn't bad. If I'd been offered nine years on diagnosis, I'd have taken it gladly. And fortunately the oncologist is quick on the draw with his prescribing pad and open to suggestions about strength.

I've received many kind emails and phone calls asking how I am after crying off writing this column last week. I tried to answer them honestly. I was going downhill, basically, I said, but largely cheerful. To some I even ventured to say that the days were richer than any I've known. I'd had a wonderful summer. At last my life had begun in earnest. But when trying to describe, to kind enquir-

ies, how I am getting on, there is always this uneasy feeling in the background:

'I sometimes hold it half a sin/ To put in words the grief I feel;/ For words, like Nature, half reveal/ And half conceal the Soul within...'

Who wrote that? I forget. A long time ago I jotted it down unattributed. Whoever it was has perfectly described my ambivalence – maybe.

But the pain that day took the wind out of my sails. This wasn't richness. This new thing was as pitiless as an experienced mafia hitman.

Poetry might have helped by lending perspective, only I couldn't read. I could barely think straight. Exhaustion. Misery. For the first time, fear. I gobbled down my pop-gun analgesics. Then late in the evening – tring! A text message. Sister Maria Clara up at St

Joseph's nunnery. Sister Maria Clara is the technical nun. In July I'd been accepted – after the sisters had met to discuss it – for a three-day retreat. When two of the nuns fell ill with Covid, they'd had to cancel. Three days ago I'd reapplied. Within the space of six weeks the idea of living with seven Benedictine nuns for a few days had altered from a light-hearted gamble to a necessity.

'Good night Jeremy! I'm sorry of the hour. Yes, you can come. The hotelletie will be free from the 13 September. It's well for you? God bless you!'

Sister Maria Clara is the only nun of the seven I've met before. Her young face is radiant with the Holy Spirit. The days suddenly felt rich again. I accepted joyfully, adding: 'Creo que voy cuesta abajo!' – I think I'm going downhill! The NCO's lips tightened with fatherly tolerance.

Sea-Change

Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change...

Down there the fathom worker
Cleans a universe of sand,
Whitening bones, blurring wood
With weed and mehair strands
Our assiduous, unfailing tide
Washing the island away
And flooding Prospero's cove.
Now all who were shore-born
Will leave in their boats. 'Good sea'
Will be their greeting, temper
Of the moon their government.
Into the water they ease the old
To look for ancestry bleached
In grave-pools, anemone men.
From the string of abandoned boats
The young dive down to sacrifice
The swaying stubble of a forest
Will be their dark adventure:
White and green bodies met for
Sea marriage and sea justice,
And counsellors uttering bubbles.
Down in the slow-moving cold
Sway the grottoes of gods.
Above, the wave-pushed wreaths
And the dazzling stare of the sun
In his empty, shadowless temple.

– Patrick Hare

Real life

Melissa Kite



The ladies in the bank now wear badges telling you to Be Kind and not do anything that might upset them in any way.

Be Kind is in big capital letters on this badge and beneath is a lot of small print explaining the well-known global problem of upset bank employees, which has reached such proportions that extreme measures are having to be taken to tackle customers from whom kindness does not flow in generous enough proportions as to prevent upset being incurred by agents of the high street banks in the course of them courageously risking all in order to speak to the likes of you and me about our banking issues.

But I couldn't quite read the small print, for the same reason I was asking this lady to heroically put herself in jeopardy to order me a new debit card with no thought of the danger to herself.

Look, I do understand that the service ethic has been reversed so that we the customer must please the service giver. And the best way to do that is not to ask for any service.

Unfortunately, my vision is now so blurred that I cannot do any banking on my phone. I either do it on my laptop or I go into the bank and grapple with the self-service screen and the ladies standing beside it, allegedly there to help.

On this occasion I had cash to deposit and then I asked the lady hovering beside the machine – allegedly to help – if she wouldn't mind showing me how to order a new debit card because mine was falling to bits.

'You can do that on the app,' she snapped. I sighed and began my tedious explanation of the worsening astigmatism in my right eye and the catastrophes that will undoubtedly unfold if I try to do banking on a mobile phone.

She scowled deeply but broadly accepted this – for I could always deploy the words 'visually impaired' or 'disability' and she full well knew it.

She announced that her colleague would order a new card for me. And she led me to one of the glass-fronted booths where most of the ladies of the bank sit, so far as I can tell, all day long enjoying frothy coffees.

There is never anyone in these booths or offices with them. I have never once seen it. So I decided to feel honoured and excited that I was about to be shown into one. And I fol-
lowed, holding my ripped debit card out in

front of me as if to excuse the intrusion, a visual apology for my impertinence if you will.

She led me to the furthest of three booths and as she did so a lady came to the door of this booth, and the expression on her face as she flapped a hand to permit me inside was something unfathomable.

It was not angry, exactly. If I had to guess I would say the emotions she was being inconvenienced with processing at that moment were a mixture of shock and a mitigating sense of relief at both the brevity of the action required for a torn debit card and her oncoming second frothy coffee at 11 a.m., for it was five before that hour.

She smiled the faintest smile possible for a face to exhibit and said: 'We can order your card using the app on your phone.'

It was as I explained again, this time in full, the complications of my ophthalmic prescription, that I noticed the badge on her desk saying Be Kind. I was trying to read the small print about the consequences of causing her upset but I couldn't focus on it. I gulped. 'You're not listening to me,' I said to her, and she flashed me a warning look. 'I don't have an app. I'm sorry. I can't see

*I'm sure this all started with
Jeremy Corbyn at PMQs. Wasn't he
the first person to demand kindness?*

very well.' She gave me a look of utter contempt and sat down at the computer on her desk, which I suppose, was never meant to be used. This was, no doubt, upsetting her.

I squinted again at the small print – something about how the bank employee couldn't be expected to help any more than they already were – and I thought: 'I'm sure this all started with Jeremy Corbyn at PMQs. Wasn't he the first person to demand kindness?'

Since when, every time I've heard kindness demanded it has been by those with a vested interest in backing you off from putting them under the least scrutiny.

The lady soon finished tapping and told me, icily, that my new card was ordered. I smiled broadly, thanked her profusely, congratulated her for doing a fantastic job, and told her: 'That's very kind of you.' But of course, there was nothing kind about it.



'I'm sorry, kids, but you won't have any good old days to look back on.'

Bridge

Janet de Botton

When was the last time you made a doubled slam – a slam that could and should have been defeated – and lost IMPs on it?

Today's hand comes from the qualifying rounds of the Mixed Teams at the World Bridge Series in Wrocław. The North hand was shared all over social media, but it's not a play problem or a defence problem. It's a judgment call and it's probably happened to many of us, but as South said modestly at the end of the hand: 'I know I'm a terrific player, pard, but even I can't know you have an Ace in your hand when I doubled!'

Here it is – what would you (as North) have led?

Dealer West

NS vulnerable

♠ J 3	♠ Q 10	♠ A K 6	♠ A K 6
♥ K 6	♥ A J 8 5 4	♥ Void	♥ Void
♦ A K 10 8 7 5	♦ J 9 4 3	♦ Q 2	♦ Q 2
♣ K 8 6	♣ 9 5	♣ A Q J 10 7 4 3 2	♣ A Q J 10 7 4 3 2

♠ 9 8 7 5 4 2	♥ Q 10 9 7 3 2	♦ 6	♣ Void
---------------	----------------	-----	--------

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	2♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♦	Dbl
All pass			

North was on lead and South's 'Light-ner' double asks partner to find an unusual lead, most frequently dummy's first bid suit. He can't guarantee a second trick but it's highly likely the defence will have one as the opps have checked for key cards and stayed out of the grand. Anyway, South quite reasonably thought he needed a Club ruff to have any chance of defeating the slam. North certainly gave it some thought but, thinking her A♥ was the 'side' trick, led it, planning to give South a ruff on the second round. Besides which she was looking at a natural trump trick, so what could go wrong? Alas everything went wrong and a mortified North wrote – 1090 on her scorecard. 'Don't worry too much,' said South sympathetically. 'We've probably picked up eight IMPs.' And they had! At the other table, teammates Ewa Wiczorek and Charlie Bucknell bid and made 7♣. Eight IMPs in, but not a mis-
take North will make again in a hurry.



So, with Mrs Ray packed off to the airport for her sun-soaked sojourn in Italy, training for *The Spectator's* Clays, Chart and Cognac Cruise begins in earnest. The clays could still do with work but I'm close to nailing the liquid element of the jaunt.

I've been helped immensely by Armit Wines and the delectable dozen bottles they sent me. Thanks to regular timed sampling, I'm close to match fitness and I'm delighted with this selection (four Italian, one French) I've made on your behalf.

The 2021 Bacioliccio Fiano (1) might be completely unpronounceable – the sort of wine you point to on a wine list rather than ask for – but it's so drinkable. From the De Conciliis family in Cilento, Campania – that glorious region of Naples and the Amalfi coast – it's as fine a Fiano as I've had: fresh, full and fruity and clean as a whistle. Luigi De C and his sister Paola take a hands-off approach to winemaking; they work organically, are energy self-sufficient and use as little sulphur as they can. And, well, they make gorgeous, great-value wines. £11.67 down from £14.78.

We offered a previous vintage of the 2020 Cantine Lunae Vermentino Elicetta Grigia (2) very successfully a couple of years ago and this is also bang on song. From the Colli di Luni ('Mountains of the Moon') in Liguria in Italy's north-west, it is – as I mentioned before – sibling of the estate's Elicetta Nera, Gambero Rosso's 2020 White Wine of the Year. It's light-ish but concentrated and, with fresh citrus, green apple and peach, offers much to enjoy. £14.17 down from £17.98.

The 2017 Cantele Salice Salentino Riserva (3) from Puglia, in Italy's heel, is 100 per cent Negroamaro. Family-owned Cantele has long pioneered the region and the grape, and this is a fine example of both. Full of sweet dark cherries and plums, there's a hint of spice too, a whisper of vanilla (it spends six months in oak), decent tannins and great acidity. £11.66 down from £13.84.

The 2018 Musella Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore (4), produced on the Monte del Drago ('Dragon Mountain') near Verona, is a typical blend of Corvina and Corvinone with tiny touches of Rondinella and Barbera, all farmed/vinified organically/biodynamically. Two-thirds of the grapes are pressed and fermented as normal while the remain-

ing third are dried and then added to the first batch and re-fermented. The result is delectably concentrated and rich, with super smooth tannins, rich, dark cherry fruit and the longest of finishes. It's a cracker! £16.25 down from £20.76.

Finally, we leave Italy in favour of the Languedoc for a fabulous bin end, the 2017 Ch. Maris 'Les Amandiers' (5), offered at a knockdown price so Armit can take in the latest vintage. It's stupid, I know, but I can't look at the bottle without thinking of Maris Crane in the TV sitcom *Frasier*, with which I became obsessed during lockdown, watching all 264 episodes chronologically.

Maris, who never actually appears, is much talked about and, quite clearly, an ocean-going PTFA. Stick-thin, with a penchant for plastic surgery, she is described by Frasier, her sometime brother-in-law, as being

'like the sun, except without the warmth'. One longs for her to appear.

Anyhoo, Maris's namesake estate in Minervois La Livinière enjoys endless sun with the warmth and, as a result, this Syrah (mainly) and Grenache blend is a punchy 15 per cent vol. A big, brooding beauty (biodynamic too), it's packed with dark berry fruit, olives, liquorice and spice. It's wonderful now but can only get better and, produced in minuscule quantities, it's well worth salting away. £47.50 down from £60.

Wines 1-4 are offered in unmixed dozens or as part of the mixed case (three bottles of each). Wine 5 is available in six-bottle boxes and delivery, as ever, is free.

Join Jonathan Ray and Martin Vander Meyer on a *bibulous tour of Champagne*, 24-28 October. For details visit: club.spectator.co.uk/events

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<i>Prices in form are per case of 12 unless otherwise stated</i>			
		<i>List price</i>	<i>Club price</i>
White			
1	2021 Bacioliccio Fiano, 12.5%	£177.36	£140.00
2	2020 Cantine Lunae Vermentino EG, 12.5%	£215.76	£170.00
Red			
3	2017 Cantele Salice Salentino Riserva, 13%	£166.08	£140.00
4	2018 Musella Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore, 14%	£249.06	£195.00
5	2017 Ch. Maris 'Les Amandiers', 15% (six bottles)	£360.00	£285.00
Mixed	6 Sample case, three each of wines 1-4	£202.07	£161.25

Total

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Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Orders can be taken by debit or credit card via email or over the telephone. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 22 October 2022.

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Chess

Chess speaks for itself

Luke McShane

'Plug the fucking laptop in!' Hans Niemann, the lively 19-year-old from the US, was left fuming – understandably – after his loss to Jan-Krzysztof Duda at the FTX Crypto Cup in Miami. The organisers set up the equipment, but Duda's laptop ran out of juice at a tense moment when both players had about a minute remaining. By the time it was resolved, Duda had gained several minutes to think and found an accurate continuation, posing difficult problems in the endgame. An exasperated Niemann lost the game, and collapsed in the next two as well, losing a clean 3-0 sweep in the four-game match.

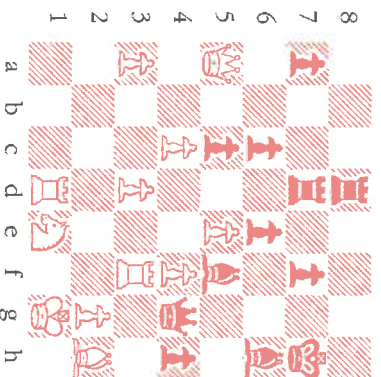
The technical mishap was all the more absurd since the players were all at the same venue in Miami, and could just as well have played *mano a mano*. But this event, the FTX Crypto Cup, was the latest in the Melvwater Champions Chess Tour, the series of online rapid events initiated by Magnus Carlsen during the pandemic. Besides, it is claimed that competitive video games (such as Dota 2 and League of Legends) are now a billion-dollar market, so promoting chess as an eSport is a plausible marketing ploy, even if it rankles the purists.

But also in over-the-board play, unexpected stoppages are not that uncommon – I was once the beneficiary of a timely fire alarm in a difficult position. And during the first game of the Fischer-Petrosian Candidates match in Buenos Aires, 1971, the lights went out due to a power cut. On that occasion, the arbiter stopped Fischer's clock, and Petrosian left the stage while Fischer remained at the board. Petrosian complained, so Fischer agreed to let his clock run while he sat thinking in the dark.

Niemann's colourful interview after his match with Duda was eclipsed the very next day, when he beat Magnus Carlsen in the first game of their match. Asked about the game, he gave the gnomonic response 'Chess speaks for itself' and swaggered off. (In the end, Carlsen still won the match).

In the past couple of years, Niemann has made remarkable progress and he now ranks as one of the world's strongest juniors. At the time of going to press, he has just defeated Carlsen again, this time in a slow game at the Sinquefeld Cup in St Louis. The next day, Carlsen took the shock

Black to play, position after 35 Re3-f3

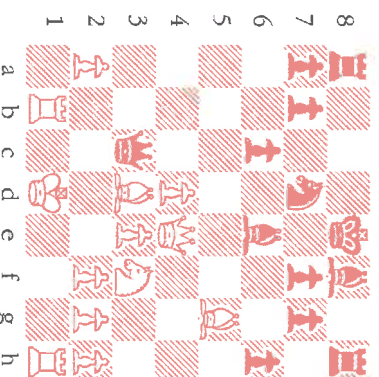


decision to withdraw from the event, without stating a reason.

Here is Niemann's win from Miami. Carlsen became burdened by the weak d3-pawn in the middlegame, and didn't last long once a second front opened on the kingside.

Magnus Carlsen–Hans Moke Niemann
FTX Crypto Cup, Miami, August 2022

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 g6 4 O-O Bg7 5 Re1 Nf6 6 e5 Nd5 7 Nc3 Nc7 8 Bxc6 dxc6 9 Ne4 b6 10 Nf6+ Kf8 11 Ne4 A popular line of the Rossolimo Sicilian (3 Bb5), where White loses time, but Black loses castling rights. **Bg4 12 d3 Ne6 13 Nge5 Nxg5 14 Bxg5 Qd5 15 Re4 Bf5 16 c4** Carlsen was critical of this move, which creates a backward pawn on d3. **Qe6 17 Re3 h6 18 Bf4 g5 19 Bg3 Rd8 20 h3 Kg8 21 a3 Kh7 22 b4 Rd7 23 bxc5 bxc5 24 Qb3 Rhd8 25 Rd1 Qg6 26 Ne1 h5 27 Nf3** Relying on 27... Bxd3 28 Nxg5+! **h4 28 Bh2 e6 29 Qc3 Bf8 30 Ne1 g4 31 hxg4 Bxg4 32 f3 Bf5 33 f4 Bh6 34 Qd5 Qg4 35 Rf3** (see diagram) 35 Rd2 was more stubborn, but 35...Rbh8 prepares an invasion on b1. **Bc4** Forcing a decisive gain of material. **36 Qxc5 Bxf3 37 Nxh3 h3 38 Qf2 Rxd3 39 Rxd3 Rxd3 40 Ne1 Rxc4 41 Qb2 Re3 42 Kf2 Bxf4**
White resigns



Competition

Gimme gimme gimme

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3265, you were invited to submit a letter to a friend asking for a loan as it might have been written by a well-known character from the field of fact or fiction.

John O'Byrne earns an honourable mention for his letter from Hamlet to Laertes. Equally impressive were Susan Firth, Mike Morrison, Ralph Bateman, J.C.H. Mounsey and John Megoran. But the cash prizes go to the winners, printed below, who pocket £25 each.

When, in the course of domestic events, it becomes necessary for a man so to impose on the goodwill of his fellow creature, as to request of him pecuniary succour, assistance, and augmentation, it behoves him set out sufficient reasons for such trespass. Let these facts be submitted to a candid friend.

'The actions of a tyrant have stopped the arteries of trade by which my prosperity is nourished.

'The delay, neglect and deceit of builders has magnified fourfold the expense of furnishing my family with a fit and commodious dwelling.

'The multiplication of my dependants and chattels, springing solely from my concern for their wellbeing, has made the heaviest demands upon my purse.

I hold this truth to be self-evident, that he who has given greatest service, merits the greatest consideration, and await your most generous reply with expectation, confidence and gratitude.

Frank Upton/Thomas Jefferson

Dear Bob,
Resist the inclination to cry 'Humbug!' when I tell you that, by keeping Christmas every day of the year this past decade, I have considerably overextended myself in what my unreformed self would have disparaged as 'the charitable way'.

That you continue the work with the open-handed meritment inspired by the blessed Spirits, I have concealed from you a second set of ledgers detailing the increasingly parlous state of the business. You have been remunerated well these past years – the Cratchit family flourishes. Master Timothy now sporting quite the paunch – so I am confident you will respond with an exuberant gesture of friendship and goodwill in capital form. You need not fear I will use the money in my old way, lending and investing at and for exorbitant interest. I intend distributing the money to beggars, my payment to be taken in their dear, toothless smiles.

Adrian Fry/Benezer Sroog

My dear Lady Denham

I implore your Ladyship, in all humility, to release me from my agony which, it seems, is interminable, not to say intolerable. Merely lend me the paltry sum of sixty thousand pounds and my troubles will cease. Afford me this loan and my debts will be cleared, the builders and tradesmen will be remunerated and Sandion will be completed. At least Miss Austen abbreviated the pain after eleven chapters, for which mercy alone she is in my opinion deserving of her place on a ten pound note

and for which relief I would owe her an eternal debt of gratitude. Mr Davies, however, compounds my agonies over at least three series, prolonging them like some nineteenth-century *Love Island*. I am, your Ladyship, in want of release from this purgatory, hence my earnest and humble request for your assistance. Your humble servant,
David Silverman/Thomas Parker to Lady Denham

Pursued by a band of fiends in human form who have dared to invade the sacred intimacies of my private life -- in short, having suffered the removal of the bedroom furniture at the hands of the bailiffs' men -- and having no hope of a remittance from any member of my scurrilous malamute family -- I turn with confidence of Copperfield the friend of my youth, certain that a trifling loan of five pounds will be immediately dispatched to lodgings under the arches, which will save my children from the ravages of want until something eligible in the way of employment turns up -- which, I may say, I am hourly expecting; loan to be repaid with astonishing velocity once I am again in funds. Yours in extremis, Wilkins Micawber
Gail White/Wilkins Micawber

Good Peter Quince, thou and I have enjoyed ever the most obscene and courageous good fellowship, and I trust to make this a pettif plea to move my friend's heart in my moment of sore embarrassment. The Duke's munificence since our lofty tragedy and comedy triumph at his nuptial festivities doth renew itself at intervals, so even before I make my supplication, thou knowest well repayment is assured. It grieves me to confess that I have been most wickedly cozened. A rogue (God shield us!) hath practised knavishly upon me with representations that he could make me a shareholder in a new Athenian theatre company. His cruel fraud hath left me penniless and in need of some immediate small competence, which I will undertake to restitution as soon as may be. My weaver's trade and player's trade together must in time's fullness restore a sweetness to our fortunes.
Chris O'Carroll/Nick Bottom

Dear Andy B, I had hoped that I might not have needed to write this letter, which is a disgrace: to you and not to me. You have so much to offer, and I would have expected you to lend it before I asked! Really, I see so much brilliant money in your deep pockets, and I would like some. Of course I will return it. I will be lowering taxes so that I will have more to spend, and that way, I will soon have plenty with which to repay your loan. In the meantime I am crying out for your cash!

Let's double down on the deal. When you let me have your cheque, I will ramp up what I want. A second cheque will follow! This. Will. Not. Be. A. Handout. I will however be reviewing your bank's mandate. That's what friends are for! M.E. Truss

Bill Greenwell/Liz Truss to Andrew Bailey

NO. 3268: BLOOD AND HONEY

News that a Winnie-the-Pooh horror flick, *Blood and Honey*, is in the pipeline prompts me to invite you to recast an extract from children's literature (please specify) in the horror genre. Please email entries (150 words/16 lines) to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 21 September.

Crossword 2572:

Blown up by Lavatch

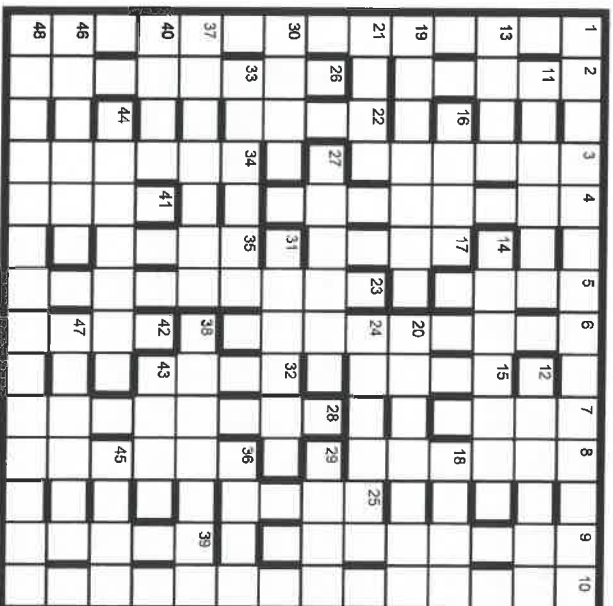
Around the perimeter, beginning at square 1, is a line of poetry (seven words, in *ODQ*) followed by the title of the poem (six words; one abbreviated word in the original title must be written out in full). Remaining unclued lights are of a kind, suggested by the quotation.

Across

- 11 Drug ring spread round
- 12 India (6)
- 12 Quiet New Year last of all for Jewish community (6)
- 13 Nothing in drink for succulent plant (4)
- 14 Awfully neat image, oddly, shows ribbons (7)
- 20 Girl dancing around current king's cabinet (7)
- 21 Save wild birds (4)
- 27 Lament trouble on flipping Internet (6)
- 29 Deity has gravitas periodically (4)
- 30 Ordinarily holding back currency (4)
- 31 Mentors following universal customs (6)
- 33 Wave from car (6)
- 36 Old man saving energy no more (4)
- 37 Maybe avarice is something for the rich? (7)
- 40 Release bird westwards (4)
- 43 Past name for struggle (4)
- 45 Drama about American patriarch (4)
- 46 Key change due to be forbidden (6)
- 47 Pearl's books about nothing in Paris (6)

Down

- 2 Shout greeting abroad, holding 30 (5)
- 3 Business contacts I upset foolishly (3-3)
- 4 Went on Israeli version of Irish TV programme? (8)



- 5 From Rome, a lower fare (4)
- 6 Introductory price I see cut on beauty treatment (9)
- 7 Weak cryptic hint (4)
- 8 Seizing pounds, corrupt dictator (6)
- 9 Calm artist in uncoordinated state (8)
- 15 Partridge, say, climbing ravine (4)
- 17 Ex-VP no good once more (4)
- 22 Cash for large jumper? (4)
- 23 Faith about a sister's art (3-6)
- 25 Fantastic beast in university (4)
- 26 Airman, one twice flying in pre-flight period (8)
- 28 Bananas galore! Is sultana here? (8)
- 32 Knight had to leave festivity (4)
- 35 Heather mostly fine (4)
- 36 Medic's nursing individual feature of hives (6)
- 39 Poet's under Welsh location (5)
- 41 A lot of bitter maple (4)
- 42 What lovers do with small drink (4)

Name
Address

SOLUTION TO 2569: ANADAD

The quotation was 'I WAS BORN TO SPEAK ALL MIRTH AND NO MATTER' from *Much Ado About Nothing* (11.1.321) by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. BEATRICE (23D/17) is the speaker and BENE/DICK (12/31) the sparing partner. Title: *Much Ado About Nothing* in cryptic form.

First prize R.R. Alford, Oundle, Peterborough
Runners-up Gordon Hobbs, Woodford Green, Essex;
Fergus Jamieson, London SE26

No sacred cows Now I know how social justice warriors feel

Toby Young

I went to the O2 on Sunday night to see the comedians Dave Chappelle and Chris Rock. Chappelle, who survived an attempt to cancel him last year, didn't disappoint, delivering some hilarious, politically incorrect jokes, and Rock was equally seditious, although his set went on for too long. But the rest of the evening was pretty painful.

The effort it takes to get to this relic of the New Labour era is truly Herculean. Indeed, Rock made a joke about it, claiming he'd set off from his hotel on Wednesday morning and only just arrived. The Tube station is North Greenwich, one beyond Canary Wharf, and your only hope of getting there in less than 90 minutes from west London is via jet ski along the Thames.

Once you arrive at the hideous car-buncle, you're herded to your 'gate' like a pig being shown to its pen, and if you feel like a beer or a snack you have to queue for 45 minutes. That's a recipe for boredom, not least because your mobile phone is placed in a sealed pouch the moment you arrive. If you still have an appetite by the time you get to the serving hatch, a hamburger and chips will cost you £16.50, and a pint of Budweiser – the only draft lager available – is £7.65. I've had cheaper meals at Michelin-starred restaurants, and this was on top of the £150 I'd paid for two tickets. If



you have any goodwill left by the time you take your seat, you're a better person than me.

Needless to say, the build-up to the headline acts was interminable, made worse by an American MC whose name I have mercifully forgotten. His worst 'bit' was an extended routine about the Queen and Prince Philip which began by reminding the audience that Meghan Markle had accused the royal family of being racist. 'Thank you, detective Markle,' he said, the gag being that the allegation is so obviously true it's hardly worth making. 'I mean, the Queen has colonised half the world, right?' he said.

I immediately leaned over to my son Ludo and pedantically pointed out that, in fact, Britain had given up nearly all of its remaining colonies in the past 75 years. ('It's a joke, Dad,' he whispered.) The 'comedian' then went on to describe a sex act between our 96-year-old monarch and her late husband which, to my horror, had the audience howling with mirth. I was so appalled I was tempted to walk out.

This was a turn-up for the books. I had come to see two comedians who are hated by left-wing puritans for making 'offensive' jokes about people who cannot hit back, e.g. the LGBT 'community'. Yet here I was, pursing my lips in disapproval because their warm-up man was targeting a woman who can't defend herself.

I regard myself as pretty broad-minded and don't think I've ever been genuinely offended by a joke before, but I got an inkling of what it must be like to be a social justice warrior watching a Netflix special by a comedian you disapprove of. It wasn't just that the joke was in appalling taste, but the fact that others found it funny

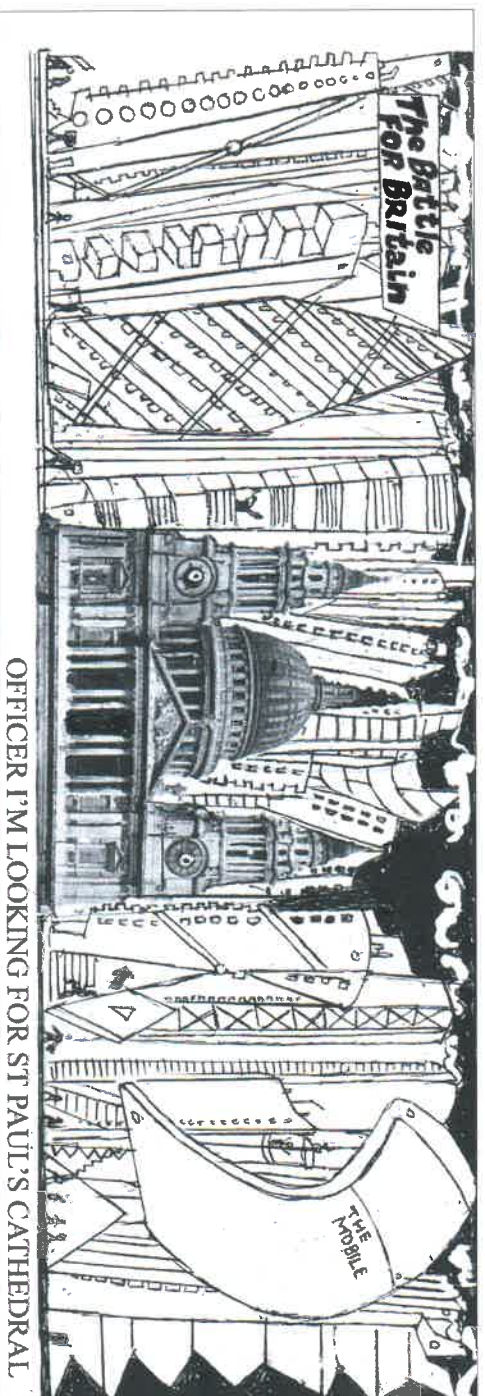
which was so upsetting. 'How dare you?' I wanted to say to the person doubled over with laughter in front of me.

The revealing thing about the audience's reaction was that they clearly weren't there because they regard Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle as heroes of the anti-woke movement. If they were, they wouldn't have laughed at a joke which involved taking it for granted that the Queen is racist. Later, they were equally appreciative of a gag by Rock ridiculing Markle for thinking it was 'racist' of an unnamed member of the royal family to speculate about the colour of her and Harry's unborn child. 'Black people have the exact same conversations,' he said. 'When I heard her say that, that's when I knew she didn't know any black people.'

I loved that bit obviously, not least because this morsel of court gossip was the sole piece of evidence Meghan produced to back up her claim that the entire royal family is racist. But Rock didn't join the dots, so the audience were perfectly happy to laugh at this joke as well as the earlier one which essentially regurgitated Meghan's baseless accusation. My conclusion is that Rock and Chappelle are clever enough to appeal to anti-woke warriors like me – which is the reason they have been catapulted to the forefront of the culture wars – without alienating their core audience, who aren't really political.

On balance, I'm glad I saw these two comics and I don't begrudge them the £150 (although I won't set foot in the O2 again). But it was a useful reminder that for most of their fans they're not standard-bearers for free speech. Just a couple of funny guys.

MICHAEL HEATH



OFFICER I'M LOOKING FOR ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Sport

All the world's a cricket pitch

Roger Alton

So farewell to cricket's The Hundred tournament, or what seemed by the end to be beefy South Africans in 'Butterkist' shirts belting sixes over cow corner off some fairly inoffensive county seamers. Does anyone remember a single result? Or really have any loyalty? Fine, have it as a marketing exercise to raise a few quid for the game, but there aren't enough great players. It felt a bit like some upgraded pub cricket – and it's going to be with us for years.

What could be massively more significant for the game in the long term is over the Atlantic, where the former England star Liam Plunkett is one of many former players attached to a new £100 million plan for a professional T20 league in America next summer, in six big cities. Indian Premier League franchises seem to be getting involved too. And Dallas Daredevils sounds more fun than Welsh Fire.

How long will it be before Test cricket only exists as a fondly remembered 'Exhibition' match every couple of years? 'Really, Grandpa, did you actually play in whites?'



Much better to remember the game with a more cerebral event at Lord's this weekend. There have always been strong links between theatre and cricket: most acting companies have their own teams and the list of playwrights who loved the game is long and glittering: Terence Rattigan, Tom Stoppard, David Hare, Alan Ayckbourn and countless others. And of course Sam Beckett and Harold Pinter, both cricket-obsessed Nobel prize-winners who transformed the nature of modern theatre. Such a shame, I always thought, that cricket wasn't more on the stage.

But now Shomit Dutta, a playwright, classics teacher and noted opening batsman for Pinter's own team the Gaieities, has put that right with a richly comic drama called *Stumped* (previously titled *Yes... No... Wait* – three words very familiar to anyone who has been run out playing club cricket). In the play, which is being performed at and live-streamed from Lord's this Saturday, Beckett and Pinter, who knew each other, are playing a match in a Cotswold village. Two wickets are down and they are both waiting to bat at five and six, while Beckett, who has his pads on, is doing the scoring, helpfully raising his arm to acknowledge signals from the umpires offstage. An argumentative Pinter finds it tricky to pad up after bruising his ankle earlier while saving a four off Beckett's bowling.

Like many players in village cricket, they are already worried about getting a lift home afterwards. They chat in witty, densely joke-packed, almost Stoppardian dialogue about Beckett's place in *Wisden* – on which Pinter is spectacularly well informed – Shakespeare, tea (of course) and an ongoing Test match as well as that elusive ride home. It is lovely stuff.

In the second act the pair are together again, but the mood is darker, the playwrights are well refreshed (or 'utterly arseholed') after their dinner and a lot of whisky, but still waiting for their lift. Though who is the man in the winter coat? And how did Beckett get that gash in his head? And who was run out so disastrously?

The play is a treat, exploring, with a deftness of touch that Shane Warne would have admired, the nature of cricket, the theatre and personal rivalries. It is available on demand from the end of September. Do see it if you can.

Sincere apologies to anyone who misguidedly took any notice of this column's warm endorsement of Emma Raducanu for the US Open. That's why I simply enjoy tennis and don't coach it. Still, at least she can at last get in a good block of much-needed training and conditioning. But here's another prediction: Britain's Jack Draper should win a major in the next five years. Or is that the commentator's curse....?



Q. We have made available our new cottage – 30 yards from our main house – to a woman with small children, who has had a tough time recently through no fault of her own. She will be staying pending her divorce. Our problem is that she keeps asking us to dinner. We like her and she is a good cook and we understand that she is trying to give something back since we are not charging rent. However, our lives are just too busy to see even our very best friends more than once a month. We can't use

Beckett and Pinter are playing a match in a Cotswold village

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

any of the normal excuses, e.g. that we are away or have people ourselves, because she can see us from her window. What do you suggest, Mary?

– Name withheld, London W2

A. *Decide to write a book. Why not actually write one? Explain that for this reason your evenings are now sacrosanct and you are only accepting invitations that you simply cannot get out of.*

Q. I am among the few people I know of my age (24) with a house big enough for dinner parties. My parents own it but they never seem to come to London. I would love to have people round – but I have to be up at six and once my cohort get around the table, even if I have said 'Look guys, come

at seven and leave at ten' and have cooked them a really good dinner, they just won't leave them. The result is that I always have to meet them in restaurants. It's such a waste of a London house. What should I do, Mary?

– Name withheld, London SE11

A. *Ask your friends for drinks instead and provide large quantities of quails' eggs for snacking. This 'luxury' food will give them the impression that they have been royally treated, but their core hunger will be unsatiated. Hence they will find themselves heading for a restaurant no later than 9 p.m., and you can explain that you won't join them as you have to be up at six. Using this method, you may be able to quietly retrain them to obey your dictat if they get another chance.*

Q. Having left London, I now do most of my socialising with people who come to stay. A number of my guests are fairly prominent, but I am a writer and have many journalist friends. The latter would be interested in leaking gossip about the first group – if I ever told them anything. I can see problems arising with my new visitors' book. I cannot have the journalists riffling through to see who else has been, nor do I want to alarm the more illustrious guests by letting them see the names of notorious gossips. Yet it is important to me to keep a record. Any suggestions, Mary?

– Name and address withheld

A. *You must keep two visitors' books in tandem. One for nosy journalists and one for illustrious guests.*

Food

Fine diner

Tanya Gold



Electric Diner is from the Soho House group, which has done

terrible things to private clubs, luckless farmhouses, domestic interiors or design and even its own restaurants. The Ned, its City hotel with ten restaurants, is genuinely insane, like Thorpe Park for people who are scared of rollercoasters; and no restaurant for adults should sell fishfinger sandwiches, even at Babington House, a Soho House hotel which is Clown Town for grown-ups but near trees.

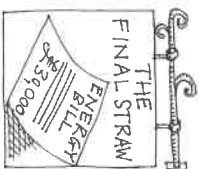
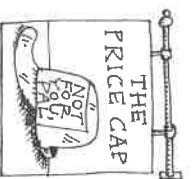
But Electric Diner is much finer: the sort of restaurant that attacks its parent with a spade, like Oedipus. It is attached to a beautiful old cinema called the Electric – electricity was once exciting enough to name things, and may be again – and it sits on the Portobello Road in a very curious part of London: as much crossroads as hill. The Portobello Road used to be a farm track between Kensal Rise and the Kensington gravel pits, surrounded by orchards and named for a

distant victory in a long-forgotten and very minor war.

It's easy to forget how fascinating London is and could be again if we only had the imagination to preserve it: villages upon villages, cities upon cities. Notting Hill, which wanders through the class system north to south, like an illustrated guide for children, is in denial about this now, as if aching for some deadly conformity. Why it seeks to conceal its undeniable magic is my first question. I suppose money is the answer; it wants to hide near other money and cast out those who have little: security in numbers, like cows. Why no one ate the food in the restaurant scene in the film *Notting Hill* – they had gooey plates of pasta and just ignored them, as if they were spectral plates and somehow dangerous – is my next question. But that was 20 years ago, and I will never get an answer now.

Like all great restaurants, it seems as if it's always been here

Restaurants are dying in these parts: a lovely Nordic bakery passed over during the pandemic, though the famous Ledbury is back for £1.85 a head, and I will get there in time. Electric Diner will endure though, beloved by locals and well-funded.



New pub signs.

Electric Diner, 191 Portobello Rd, London W11 2ED. 020 7908 9696.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Corn

'Wha, wha?' said my husband in a slack-jawed way, throwing over a copy of the *Guardian*, as though it was my fault. "'Today,'" it said, "just three crops – rice, wheat and corn – provide nearly half of the world's calories." I saw the problem. It was obvious, from a process of elimination, that by *corn* it meant 'maize'.

Elsewhere ambiguities abound. Since the Ukraine war began, discussion of wheat and maize has increased no end, but it is often impossible to tell whether wheat or maize is meant by *corn*. I thought we had agreed to differ with America on this. As a general term the word



corn includes all the cereals, wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, rice, etc.; the *Oxford English Dictionary* remarks charitably in an entry not fully updated since 1893. 'Locally, the word, when not otherwise qualified, is often understood to denote that kind of cereal which is the leading crop of the district; hence in the greater part of England corn = wheat, in North Britain and Ireland = oats; in the United States

the word, as short for Indian corn, is restricted to maize.'

They began early with the 'maize' meaning. In 1608, Captain John Smith, fresh from killing Turks and escaping their slavery, found himself in charge of the colony of Virginia. 'It pleased God (in our extremity),' he recorded, 'to move the Indians to bring us Corne, ere it was halfe ripe, to refresh us, when we rather expected they would destroy us.'

Corn moved happily from 'wheat' to 'maize' because at bottom it meant 'grain'. Indeed it is *grain* that Americans today call the variety of cereals. In

Soho House has gone global, a design pandemic of its own. Not all well-funded restaurants deserve to survive – I gnash my teeth at the gilded pits of Mayfair – but this one does. It has, probably by accident, a mad kind of integrity. It meets the hidden oddness of Notting Hill with an oddness of its own: I think it is the closeness of real cinema. And it's a diner, a genre of restaurant I love.

The diner is a well-priced and doughy fantasy: hack Americana, brought to you by gasoline, cinema and insatiable greed. If you blacked out the windows – and there aren't many – you could be anywhere. You could be in *Deliverance*, *The Sopranos*, a snowstorm or Hove. There's a nothingness here which is very pleasing. All great cities should have pockets of nothingness.

The dining room is long and slender, bustling with morning. Like all great restaurants, it seems as if it's always been here: the orchards are as forgotten as the minor war. If it looks familiar that's because it has been copied so faithfully – pale tiling, red banquettes, a kitchen open to the room. The menu is a journey through American desires and, sequentially, the nearness of obesity, though you can scan a code for calories (and I wonder who does that). 'mac n' cheese; eggs any style; waffles; Philly chili cheese doge. It's early so we take the full English and it's perfectly done. Nothingness with a good fat sausage too.

deep history, the words *corn* and *grain* come from the same origin. So does *kernel*. Among our Indo-European ancestors, the root meaning was 'something ground'.

We don't mind speaking of a *grain of sand* or a *grain of salt*, and not long ago English speakers referred to *corns of salt* or sand. For years, having been deceived at infant school, I thought corned beef came from beasts fed on maize, though it was in fact cured with corns of salt.

Faced with cereal ambiguity, the best chance is to use specific *wheat* or *maize* and to shelve *corn*.

—Dot Wordsworth

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